

The Ghouta Attacks: Who was responsible?

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“He who permits himself to tell a lie often finds it much easier to do it a second and a third time, til at length it becomes habitual; he tells lies without attending to it, and truths without the world’s believing him.” – Thomas Jefferson, 1785¹

By design, the final report of the United Nations Mission to investigate allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic did not address the question of who was responsible for the August 21, 2013 gas attack in the suburbs of Damascus. However, based on emails that I have received from them, U.S. lawmakers hold an unwavering belief that these horrendous acts were carried out by the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

Typical was the assertion by U.S. Senator Pat Toomey (R, PA) that “the Assad regime carried out a large scale chemical weapons attack against the people of Ghouta, Syria in which over 1,400 civilians were killed.”² Similarly, Senator Martin Heinrich (D, NM), a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, wrote that “a chemical weapons attack occurred on August 21” and “that attack was planned and carried out by Bashar al-Assad's regime.”³ Even President Obama affirmed that “the Assad regime used chemical weapons in an attack that killed more than 1,000 Syrians.”⁴

Yet to date, no convincing evidence has been released in support of these allegations. On the contrary, one senior U.N. official, citing rebels in Ghouta, stated on condition of anonymity, “Saudi intelligence was behind the attacks,” and not the Syrian Arab Republic.⁵ Strange as it seems, the U.N. mission’s final report showed absolutely NO evidence of sarin (GB) in the 13 samples taken from the Moadamiyah district of Ghouta and only one confirmed instance of byproducts.⁶ So if the U.S. possesses credible evidence, I should think leaders would feel a responsibility to disclose it publicly in order to dispel any doubts.

On the other hand, evidence that it was the so-called opposition forces in Syria that carried out these attacks is abundant, and includes the following:

- A U.S. National Ground Intelligence Center (NGIC) report confirmed that al-Qa’ida in a Sunni-controlled region of Iraq manufactured the sarin gas and then shipped it to Turkey for use by Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria;⁷
- A group of veteran intelligence professionals maintain that the most reliable intel showed that Bashar al-Assad was NOT responsible for the chemical incident on August 21, and that British intelligence officials also knew of this;⁸
- The sarin used in the attack was classified by the U.K. Defence Science Technology Laboratory as “kitchen ” grade, not the military grade that had been in Syria’s former chemical arsenal;⁹
- The projectiles tested by the U.N. inspectors, which have very distinct ribbed-ring fins similar to those used by rebels in Aleppo, Damascus and elsewhere, are not standard weapons of the Syrian Army;¹⁰

- Liwaa al-Islam insurgent forces deployed near Damascus included the so-called “Chemical Weapons Front,” the suspected perpetrator of the chemical attack, led by Wahhabist and former Saudi intelligence operative Zahran Alloush;¹¹
- Apparently seeking approval for U.S. military intervention in Syria in an August 2, 2013 meeting with President Putin, Prince Bandar of Saudi Arabia claimed control over terrorists in both Russia and Syria, and hinted of an upcoming provocative event;¹²
- Belgium writer Pierre Piccinin da Prata, who was kidnapped by Jabhat al-Nusra, said that during his captivity he overheard his rebel captors admit that they carried out the Aug. 21 chemical attack as a false flag in order to lure the U.S. into the conflict;¹³
- On August 13 and 14, 2013, U.S., Turkish and Qatari intelligence officers briefed Free Syrian Army commanders in Antakya, Turkey on plans for a military surge in Syria following “a war-changing development,”¹⁴ no doubt a reference to the Ghouta operation.

In its zeal to attack Syria, the Obama administration even went so far as to dismiss the value of an investigation by the U.N.-led forensics team, which had already been in Syria three days at the time of the Ghouta attack, claiming that the Syrian government had time to systematically destroy evidence.¹⁵ This is while forensics teams in Iraq found evidence of mustard and sarin gas use in 1992,¹⁶ some four years after a chemical attack by Saddam’s forces.¹⁷ In view of this, I must ask why was there such resistance by Washington to a U.N. investigation, with charges that it was “too late to be credible,”¹⁸ if not out of fear of impeding the U.S. plan for an assault. And judging by that week’s unprecedented arms shipments, which included 20 truckloads of sophisticated anti-tank weapons and guided missiles, the U.S. and its “partners” clearly had definite plans to escalate the conflict after the Ghouta operation.¹⁹

Additionally, one must look at the track record of the so-called opposition forces concerning their use of chemical weapons. Largely unreported in the west, the U.N. corroborated three instances of charges brought by the Syrian government of chemical weapons use by rebel factions against Syrian troops and civilians: in Khan Al Asal on March 19, in Jobar on August 24 and in Ashrafiyah Sahnaya on August 25, all in 2013.²⁰ Also of interest is that three out of the four allegations of chemical weapons use made by Syria were confirmed while only five out of the seventeen brought by the U.S., U.K. and France were corroborated, suggesting that the west may have made these charges for propaganda purposes.²¹ For her part, U.N. investigator Carla Del Ponte said that she had “strong, concrete suspicions but not yet incontrovertible proof” that rebels had used sarin in the attacks on Khan al-Asal, Sheik Maqsood and Saraqeb.²²

Furthermore, one must ask who stood to benefit most from this chemical attack in Syria. Certainly not the al-Assad government since by August 21, Syrian forces had gained an upper hand on the foreign-backed insurrection. With a resounding victory at Qusair in June 2013,²³ the Syrian army had made great strides in repatriating substantial parts of the country, and this is while Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan were shipping massive amounts of arms – some 160 plane loads – to rebel forces.²⁴ So the Syrian government would have had to have been not only viciously brutal to commit such a barbaric act, but also incredibly stupid for doing so while U.N. inspectors were waiting in Damascus as well as for not immediately sending in special troops to clean up tell-tale evidence and prevent photos and videos from being taken afterwards.²⁵

It should also be mentioned that since the Syrian Army possessed the more lethal VX nerve gas in grenades specifically designed for use in urban counterinsurgency operations, why would they use a kitchen variety sarin, the residue of which would hinder “mop-up” operations in the insurgent-held areas?²⁶ Noteworthy as well are U.S. intelligence reports which confirmed that the al-Qa’ida-linked terrorist Jabhat al-Nusra had the knowledge and ability to manufacture quantities of sarin nerve gas, hence, the logical suspect in the August 21 attack should be Jabhat al-Nusra, and not the government of President Bashar al-Assad.²⁷

Finally, the White House claimed in an August 30, 2013 statement that “In the three days prior to the attack, we collected streams of human, signals and geospatial intelligence that reveal regime activities that we assess were associated with preparations for a chemical weapons attack.”²⁸ If so, why did the White House not feel a moral obligation to confront the Syrian government at that time but instead chose to wait? Based on the White House figures, this could have prevented the loss of 1429 lives in Ghouta, Syria. However, leaked NSA documents published by the Washington Post on August 29, 2013 reveal that the White House in fact had no direct knowledge of the communications between high-level Syrian leaders.²⁹ This points to the unavoidable conclusion that once again, the intelligence was being cherry-picked to suit the U.S. foreign policy, which, as is well known, calls for regime change in Damascus.

Washington officials have proven themselves to be liars in the past; all one need do to be convinced of this is to look at the record of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which was based on lies, false allegations and fabricated intelligence. The incident in Ghouta, Syria, possesses disturbing similarities to one in Sarajevo, where on August 28, 1995, a mortar shell hit Markale market killing 38 and wounding 90. While Bosnian-Serb forces were blamed, it later turned out that the projectile had been launched by Bosnian-Muslim extremists against their own people, for use as a provocation for NATO “humanitarian intervention.”³⁰ Likewise in 1964, the NSC manipulated the sequence of intelligence surrounding the alleged attack on American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin by North Vietnam to win Congressional approval for the Johnson administration’s desire to escalate the U.S. war on Vietnam.³¹

Therefore, contrary to the claims of the White House or other U.S. government officials, I cannot believe that His Excellency President Bashar al-Assad of Syria was in any way responsible for the August 21, 2013 attacks. I do believe, based on the evidence available, that this was a false-flag operation, planned and executed by Saudi-funded terrorists with the collusion of the Israeli entity and the approval of the United States.

Endnotes

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³ Martin Heinrich, email to the author, September 9, 2013

⁴ Barack Obama, email to the author, September 23, 2013.

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