

Washington floats chemical weapons charge as pretext for Syria buildup

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The Obama administration and the corporate media have cited unspecified “intelligence” about the movement of chemical weapons to issue new threats of direct intervention in Syria, where Washington and its allies have been backing so-called “rebels” in a bid to topple the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton both made public statements Monday alleging a danger of Syria using chemical weapons and threatening US retaliation.

Appearing before a military audience at the National Defense University in Fort McNair, Obama declared, “I want to make it absolutely clear to Assad and anyone who is under his command... If you make the tragic mistake of using these weapons there will be consequences and you will be held accountable.”

“This is a red line for the United States,” Clinton said earlier in the day after a meeting in Prague with Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg.

“I’m not going to telegraph in any specifics what we would do in the event of credible evidence that the Assad regime has resorted to using chemical weapons against their own people, but suffice it to say that we’re certainly planning to take action if that eventuality were to occur,” Clinton warned.

Schwarzenberg told the media that Czech troops specializing in chemical weapons had been sent to Jordan and were “training” with forces there.

Citing unnamed senior officials who claim to have seen unspecified intelligence on Syrian chemical weapons, the *New York Times*, CNN and other media have joined forces with the Obama administration in promoting the chemical weapons justification for another US war of aggression.

What becomes clear in examining these reports, as well as the statements from the administration, is that the alleged threat from Syrian “weapons of mass destruction”

is entirely concocted. Not a single piece of hard evidence is cited by any government official or any media source.

In a breathless report on Monday, CNN’s Pentagon correspondent Barbara Starr quoted an unnamed “senior US official” as describing “worrying signs” of supposed activity around chemical weapons sites in Syria in “the last few days.”

“The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitiveness of the information discussed, declined to specify the exact intelligence that the United States has gathered in the past few days,” Starr said.

The CNN report quotes one US official as saying that “this puts us into the contingency of potential US action.”

The chemical weapons story was initially broken on Sunday by the *New York Times* in a front-page article co-authored by David Sanger, the *Times*’ chief Washington correspondent, and Eric Schmitt, its national security correspondent. Writing that “what exactly the Syrian forces intend to do with the weapons remains murky,” the *Times* correspondents cited as their source unnamed “officials who have seen the intelligence from Syria.”

Syria’s Foreign Ministry categorically denied that the country’s military is preparing to use chemical weapons. A statement released in Damascus said that Syria “would not use chemical weapons—if there are any—against its own people under any circumstances.”

What is particularly significant in the statements of Obama and other US officials is the absence of any expression of concern over the Syrian military’s chemical weapons stockpile falling into the hands of the so-called rebels whom Washington is supporting.

It has become impossible to conceal the fact that the main fighting force challenging the Assad regime is dominated by Islamist militias, including forces tied to Al Qaeda, who would be prepared to use such weapons against civilian populations in Western Europe or the United States. That this is a matter of official indifference

only underscores the glaring contradiction between the official expressions of concern and the real motives underlying the US intervention.

The leaks about chemical weapons were made on the eve of a NATO foreign ministers meeting in Brussels on Tuesday and Wednesday. The meeting will decide on Turkey's request for the deployment of Patriot surface-to-air missile batteries on the country's 560-mile border with Syria.

The Turkish government has claimed that the missiles are necessary to counter an alleged threat of missiles with chemical warheads being fired towards its territory by the Syrian armed forces.

Turkey has been among the most important state sponsors of the Syrian insurgency, funneling arms and supplies and reportedly providing Turkish military officers as "advisers." It has allowed the anti-Assad forces to use its territory as a base and hosted a CIA station, where US operatives have coordinated the provision of arms, money and intelligence to the "rebels."

The deployment of the Patriot missiles, which both US and NATO officials have indicated will be approved at this week's meeting, will mark a major turning point in the imperialist intervention in Syria. It will place US and NATO forces in direct confrontation with the Syrian military and pave the way for a far more open intervention.

While the missile batteries are supposedly aimed against a threat of surface-to-surface missiles from Syria, a far more likely use is to deny Syrian military aircraft the ability to operate in northern Syria, effectively carving out a "no-fly zone" in which the US-NATO-backed "rebels" can operate with relative impunity. As in last year's US-NATO intervention in Libya, such a development would likely prove the first step in a direct war for regime-change.

The claims of threats from Syrian chemical weapons also serve as a pretext for a direct ground invasion. As the *New York Times* article notes, the US and its allies "have long been developing contingency plans in case they decided to intervene in an effort to neutralize the chemical weapons, a task that the Pentagon estimates would require upward of 75,000 troops."

The article also points to the Pentagon's having "quietly sent a task force of more than 150 planners and other specialists to Jordan to help the armed forces there to, among other things, prepare for the possibility that Syria would lose control of its chemical weapons." The phrase "among other things" serves to mask the essential

mission of this force of US special operations troops, which is to aid the "rebel" operations inside Syria and serve as an advance guard for a more direct US-NATO intervention.

Debka.com, a web site with close ties to Israeli intelligence, reported that last week the "rebels" had carried out an attack that destroyed a Russian-built electronic warning radar station in southern Syria, effectively blinding the regime in the face of any attacks prepared by the Israeli military. According to a report in the *Atlantic* Monday, Israel has approached the Jordanian government with plans for air strikes on Syrian chemical weapons sites. Debka described the deployment of the Patriot missiles and the attacks on Syrian radar as representing "a coordinated military effort."

Within just weeks of the US election, concerted preparations are underway for yet another war of aggression in the Middle East. The warnings about supposed threats from "weapons of mass destruction" are an unmistakable echo of the lies used to justify the catastrophic US war against Iraq a decade ago. The *New York Times*, the "newspaper of record" and voice of official liberalism, served as the indispensable conduit for government disinformation about non-existent Iraqi WMD, lending credibility to the propaganda used to justify the unprovoked US invasion. Clearly, the same modus operandi is being employed in Syria.

In the offing is a war with potentially far more devastating consequences than the eight-year US intervention in Iraq or the more than decade-long war in Afghanistan. In attacking Syria, US imperialism is aiming to pave the way for an assault on Iran in a bid to reorganize the entire region in its own interests.



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