

Syrian opposition fighters arrested with chemical weapons

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In a series of raids in the capital of Istanbul and in the southern provinces of Mersin, Adana and Hatay near the Syrian border, Turkish police rounded up 12 members of Syria's Al Qaeda-affiliated Al Nusra Front along with chemical weapons materials.

The Turkish media initially reported that police recovered four and a half pounds of sarin, the deadly nerve gas which had earlier been linked to chemical weapons attacks inside Syria.

While widely reported in the Turkish press, the arrests Wednesday have been virtually blacked out by the corporate media in the US. Newspapers like the *New York Times*, which have openly promoted a US intervention in Syria, citing alleged chemical weapons use by the regime of Bashar al-Assad as a pretext, have posted not a word about the raids in Turkey.

The daily newspaper *Zaman* reported that "the al-Nusra members had been planning a bomb attack for Thursday in [the Turkish city of] Adana but that the attack was averted when the police caught the suspects. Along with the sarin gas, the police seized a number of handguns, grenades, bullets and documents during their search."

The city of Adana, approximately 60 miles from the Syrian border, has a sizable Alawite Arab population that is sympathetic to the Syrian government and hostile to the Sunni Islamist forces that have waged the US-backed war for regime change on the ground in Syria.

The Al Nusra Front, which has formally declared its allegiance to Al Qaeda, was declared a foreign terrorist organization by the US State Department last December. The United Nations Security Council added the group to the body's Al Qaeda sanctions blacklist Friday.

The Syrian government had requested that the group

be subjected to sanctions as a terrorist organization last month, but the action was initially blocked by Britain and France. Finally, an agreement was reached to declare Al Nusra an alias for Al Qaeda in Iraq.

The Al Nusra Front has been universally acknowledged as the most effective fighting force of the so-called rebels seeking the Assad government's overthrow. Both Britain and France recently succeeded in overturning a European Union ban on arms exports to Syria, clearing the way for them to ship weapons to the "rebels."

None of the arrested suspects have been identified. Turkish media reported that five of them were released late Thursday, and seven are still being held for questioning. The government of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, which has provided extensive material support for the Syrian opposition, has given no public explanation of the police actions.

Adana provincial governor Huseyin Avni Cos denied on Thursday that sarin had been recovered in the raids but did allow that unknown chemicals had been found and were being analyzed.

The arrests come little more than two weeks after twin terrorist car bombings claimed the lives of 52 people in the Turkish city of Reyhanli in southern Hatay province near the border with Syria. The Erdogan government seized upon the incident to blame the Syrian government and call for international intervention to topple Assad. It simultaneously imposed an unprecedented gag order on the Turkish press to prevent reporting on the extensive evidence that the attacks were the work of Syrian opposition groups, which use Reyhanli as a supply base and who have free movement across the Turkish-Syrian border.

Subsequently, authorities arrested an army private on charges of "crimes against the state" for allegedly

leaking top secret cables that indicated the government's prior knowledge that the bombings were being planned by the Al Qaeda-linked forces in Syria. RedHack, the Turkish hacker group which made the cables public last week, denied that it had any contact with the arrested private, who was identified as Utku Kali.

The Adana daily *Taraf* reported Thursday that police are mounting road blocks and conducting searches in the area for a vehicle loaded with explosives that is believed to have been sent to the area by the US-backed anti-Assad forces.

The discovery of sarin or some other lethal chemical weapons materials in the hands of Al Nusra Front operatives in Turkey prompted calls by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov for an immediate investigation. He condemned the continuing failure to send a United Nations inspection team to Syria to investigate a chemical weapons incident last March outside of the city of Aleppo.

"We are highly disappointed that because of the political games, the UN Secretariat failed to respond to that request swiftly," Lavrov told reporters.

These "political games" refer to demands by Washington and its allies that any UN team be given carte blanche to inspect any and all Syrian facilities and interrogate anyone it chooses, along the lines of the inspection regime created in Iraq in the run-up to the US invasion of 2003.

The Assad government has charged that the March attack, which killed 26 people, 16 of them government soldiers, was carried out by the Western-backed forces.

The Obama administration has repeatedly declared the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government to be a "red line" or "game changer" that would trigger unspecified US intervention. At the same time, Washington and its European NATO allies have turned a blind eye to evidence of chemical weapons use by the Islamist militias.

There have been repeated claims by the Syrian opposition groups, as well as by the British and French governments, of chemical weapons use by the regime. Last month, however, Carla del Ponte, a leading member of the UN commission of inquiry on Syria, stated that the bulk of the evidence indicated chemical weapons use by the rebels.

The latest development in Turkey suggests that the

Western-backed Islamist militias were preparing to launch another chemical weapons attack, apparently against a Turkish civilian population, with the aim of producing mass casualties that would be blamed on the Syrian regime and create the conditions for a US-led intervention.

The silence of the US media on the incident only demonstrates that it is prepared to play the same role that it did in Iraq, working to sell a war based upon lies to the American public. The experience of the past decade of unending war, however, has made this task more difficult.

A Gallup poll released on Friday found that more than two out of three Americans (68 percent) oppose any US military intervention in Syria if "diplomatic efforts fail to end the civil war in Syria."



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