

Pretext for a new war: Obama lies about Syrian chemical weapons

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In a statement issued Thursday, the Obama administration has declared that the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad has violated “international norms” by using chemical weapons on multiple occasions over the past year. The claim is a transparent lie that will be used by the US and its European allies, Britain and France, as the pretext for arming their right-wing Islamist proxies and for military intervention.

The allegations are no more credible than the lies about weapons of mass destruction that were used to justify the criminal US-led invasion of Iraq. The statement by Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes claimed that US intelligence agencies had “high confidence” in their assessment, but acknowledged that physiological evidence of sarin gas exposure did “not tell us how or where the individuals were exposed or who was responsible.”

The US claims simply ignored evidence that anti-Assad militias had chemical weapons and may have used them. Late last month, the Turkish press reported that the Al Qaeda-linked Al Nusra Front, which forms the military backbone of the anti-Assad forces, had obtained chemical weapons and was planning to use them (see: “Syrian opposition fighters arrested with chemical weapons”). The Syrian “rebels”, which have been pressing for Western military assistance, have far more to gain than the Assad regime by staging small-scale chemical weapons attacks.

Rhodes alluded to the real purpose of the chemical weapons allegations, saying that Obama had declared they were “a red line” that “would change his calculus and it has.” He acknowledged that Obama had “authorised the expansion of our assistance to the [opposition] Supreme Military Council” and would be “consulting with Congress... in the coming weeks.” He warned that “these efforts will increase going forward.”

The timing of the announcement is no accident. It comes as the Obama administration has been immersed in emergency discussions this week on how to stem the recent defeats inflicted on the anti-Assad militias. The Syrian army, reinforced by fighters from Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shiite militia movement, took back the strategic town of Qusayr on June 5, cutting a crucial supply line from Lebanon for the so-called rebels.

Syrian government forces are reportedly now massing in the north for a drive to seize Syria’s largest city of Aleppo. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that General Salim Idris, the titular commander of the “Free Syrian Army,” has issued desperate appeals to the US, France and Britain for “anti-tank missiles, anti-aircraft weapons and hundreds of thousands of ammunition rounds.” According to a US official involved in talks with Idris, he warned that “he cannot hold on to Aleppo without these weapons.”

The disintegration of anti-Assad forces is not primarily due to the lack of weapons. Rather, working people are increasingly hostile to sectarian atrocities carried out by the right-wing Islamists that dominate the Syrian opposition forces. Even the British-based *Economist* acknowledged: “Many Syrians originally sympathetic to the rebels have been horrified by events such as the reported execution on June 9 of a 14-year-old boy by jihadists in Aleppo, allegedly for insulting the Prophet Muhammad.”

The US is already engaged in talks with France and Britain over the direct supply of arms to Syrian opposition forces and plans to press for further assistance at next week’s G8 meeting. Washington has already been colluding with Middle Eastern allies—Qatar and Saudi Arabia—to supply large quantities of arms and ammunition to the Syrian “rebels.”

French officials plan to meet with General Idris this weekend to assess his military needs. The European Union lifted its embargo on supplying military hardware to anti-Assad militias on the condition that shipments not start until August 1. Speaking to the *Wall Street Journal*, French officials dismissed the timetable as a “gentlemen’s agreement” that was not legally binding.

The *Journal* also revealed advanced US plans to impose a no-fly zone inside areas of Syria adjacent to Jordan. The Pentagon has already moved Patriot anti-missile systems, F-16 fighters and V-22 tilt rotor Osprey aircraft, used to rescue downed pilots, to Jordan under the guise of participating in joint war games. The US has also stationed a big-deck amphibious warship with a Marine Expeditionary Unit in the Jordanian port of Aqaba.

According to the *Journal*, the Pentagon plan involves “creating an area to train and equip rebel forces” inside Syria and “a no-fly zone stretching up to 25 miles into Syria which would be enforced using aircraft flown from Jordanian bases.” The Jordanian regime has already agreed to the use of its military bases and “it would take about a month” to implement.

As was the case in the US-NATO war to topple Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, the imposition of a no-fly zone would simply be the pretext for an escalation into a full-scale air war in support of anti-Assad militias on the ground. Given the far more substantial character of the Syrian military, it could also be a prelude to the intervention of US-led ground forces.

Influential Republican Senator John McCain has already been pressing for a far more aggressive American intervention into Syria, including supplying weapons and airstrikes. In a clear signal that the Democrats and the Obama administration are rapidly moving to do so, former President Bill Clinton was reported in the *New York Times* yesterday as saying in meeting with McCain that it had been a “big mistake” not to directly intervene, and, gesturing towards the senator, added: “I agree with you about this.” The Obama administration’s bogus claims about chemical weapons use have now provided the pretext.

Once again the Obama administration is dragging the American people into a reactionary, neo-colonial war on the basis of lies. Washington’s determination to oust

President Assad is no more about bringing “democracy” to Syria than the US invasion of Iraq was to end the supposed WMD threat posed by Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

US imperialism is seeking to establish its untrammelled domination in the oil-rich Middle East at the expense of its rivals and regards both Syria and its ally Iran as obstacles to its interests. A reckless escalation of the Syrian conflict by the US and its European allies raises the very real danger of drawing in other major powers such as Russia into a broader regional and international war.



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