

UN Syrian chemical weapons report exposes Washington's lies

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The release of a United Nations chemical weapons inspectors' report pointing to multiple sarin gas attacks carried out by so-called "rebel" forces further exposes the Obama administration's lies about Syrian government responsibility for an August 21 chemical shelling of the Ghouta area outside of Damascus.

Washington seized on the incident as the pretext for a planned bombing campaign and stepped-up drive for regime-change against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The UN report's appearance last Thursday follows the publication of Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Seymour Hersh's detailed article in the *London Review of Books* revealing that the Obama administration deliberately manipulated intelligence to falsely assert it had proof of Syrian government and military responsibility for the Ghouta attack.

Hersh cited current and former US military and intelligence officials on the falsification of intelligence regarding the August 21 attack as well as the Obama administration's concealment of the existence of intelligence reports warning that the Al Qaeda-affiliated Al Nusra Front militia had the capacity to manufacture and weaponise the nerve gas sarin used in the Ghouta attack.

The 82-page UN chemical weapons report is based on extensive on-the-ground investigations of multiple sites where allegations of chemical weapons use were raised by either the Syrian government or the American, British and French governments. The inspectors analysed soil and other environmental samples, examined hair, urine, tissue and blood samples for trace chemicals, interviewed survivors, witnesses and medical personnel, and documented munitions allegedly used to deliver the sarin in each incident.

They concluded that in addition to the Ghouta incident, there were at least four "probable" sarin attacks. In three of these attacks, Syrian army soldiers were the victims of

the deadly gas, while in the fourth, civilians were affected. Not a single one of the confirmed chemical attacks were against "rebel" militia fighters.

Two of the now confirmed chemical attacks occurred within days of the Ghouta gassing. On August 24—three days after Ghouta and at the same time Obama was readying the US military for a strike, while denouncing the Syrian government for crossing his "red line"—sarin gas was deployed against Syrian soldiers in the Damascus suburb of Jobar. What the UN report describes as a "relatively small attack" was confirmed through interviews with survivors and clinicians, and through sarin-positive blood samples collected by Syrian authorities and authenticated by the UN inspectors.

The report says of the incident: "A group of soldiers were tasked to clear some buildings under the control of opposition forces. Around 1100 hours, the intensity of the shooting from the opposition subsided and the soldiers were under the impression that the other side was retreating. Approximately 10 meters away from some soldiers, an improvised explosive device reportedly detonated with a low noise, releasing a very badly smelling gas. A group of 10 soldiers was evacuated in armoured personal vehicles to the field medical point with breathing difficulties and with, not further specified, strange symptoms."

A day after this gas attack, on August 25, sarin was again used "on a small scale against soldiers" in the southern town of Ashrafiah Sahnaya, during clashes between "rebels" and troops in control of a government checkpoint. The UN again based its findings on interviews and blood samples recovered by the Syrian government.

The inspectors were not asked to determine who was responsible for the sarin attacks they confirmed, and the report is therefore silent on this issue. The report, moreover, is couched throughout in the most cautious

language, restricting itself to relaying scientific findings.

If anything, this only makes the contents of the document all the more damning. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that the US-backed, Islamist-dominated “rebel” militias were responsible for multiple war crimes in the form of chemical attacks against both Syrian soldiers and civilians.

These were carried out in an attempt to reverse battlefield losses and trigger a Libyan-style US-British-French military intervention to crush the Assad regime and install the imperialist-backed opposition in power. The Obama administration deliberately lied about the Ghouta attack as it weighed up an opportunity to remove another perceived obstacle to US imperialist domination of the oil-rich region and further isolate Iran, ahead of a possible military strike against that country.

Ultimately, Obama pulled back amid sharp tactical differences within his administration and the US military-intelligence establishment over the implications of handing control of Syria over to Al Qaeda-dominated forces, as well as overwhelming opposition from the people of America and the world to another unprovoked war in the Middle East.

Washington instead engineered a tactical shift, agreeing to Russia’s plan for Syria to destroy its chemical weapons and opening up talks with the Iranian government. A major motive in this shift was the desire to free up American military forces for the “pivot” to Asia and a potential war against US imperialism’s rising international rival, China.

The latest revelations concerning the Obama administration’s lies on Syria further expose the politically criminal role played by the US and international media. Ten years ago, the Bush administration’s fabrications about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction were promoted as good coin by the establishment press. In August and September of this year, the media proceeded as though the world population was affected by collective amnesia, with bogus “intelligence” and unsubstantiated assertions from the White House once again relayed via front-page news stories and television news bulletins.

Now that this propaganda barrage has been thoroughly exposed, the cover-up continues. Both Seymour Hersh’s article and the UN findings on chemical attacks in Syria have been either downplayed or blacked out entirely.

The international pseudo-left organisations have served as accomplices in these efforts to suppress any exposure of the Obama administration’s war propaganda. The

misnamed International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the US, the New Anti-capitalist Party in France and the Left Party in Germany continue to agitate for a stepped-up US intervention against the Syrian regime, maintaining that the “rebel” militias are spearheading a democratic “revolution.”

From the time of Obama’s war preparations in August to the present day, these middle-class, pro-imperialist organisations have rejected any challenge to the US allegation that the Assad government was responsible for Ghouta. They now avoid any mention of the Hersh and UN revelations.

In stark contrast, the *World Socialist Web Site* immediately challenged the claims made about Ghouta by the Obama administration and allied governments internationally. In an article published the day after the incident, the WSWS noted: “The unsubstantiated charges that the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad carried out a chemical weapons attack outside Damascus killing large numbers of civilians have all the hallmarks of a staged provocation aimed at provoking Western intervention... If one were to ask who benefits from such a crime, it is clearly not the Assad regime, but the Islamist-led forces fighting to overthrow it. Accusations of war crimes by the Syrian government come as these forces are confronted with growing crisis and a series of military defeats.”

This analysis, developed in numerous subsequent articles and commentaries, stands entirely vindicated. The WSWS is the authentic voice of the world socialist movement and the international working class in opposition to imperialist war.



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