

Media blacks out Seymour Hersh exposé of US lies on Syrian gas attack

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Nearly two days after the *London Review of Books* published a lengthy exposé by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh detailing efforts by the Turkish government to stage a provocation to bring the US military directly into the civil war in Syria, the US media has blacked out the report.

Hersh, who has authored groundbreaking investigative reports uncovering US atrocities, including the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War and the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib during the Iraq war, titled his article on last August's sarin gas attack outside of Damascus "The Red Line and the Rat Line."

The "red line" refers to President Obama's threat to attack Syria if the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad used chemical weapons. The "rat line" was a CIA-organized supply chain running from Benghazi, Libya through southern Turkey and into Syria, which was used to smuggle weapons to the Syrian "rebels."

The article describes efforts by the Turkish government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to assist Syrian "rebels" of the al-Nusra Front, an Islamist force linked to Al Qaeda, in staging the poison gas attack on Ghouta on August 21, 2013.

Hundreds died in the atrocity, which the Obama White House seized on as a *casus belli* to bomb Syria. Faced with deep divisions within the American state and problems mobilizing US allies in Europe, and broad popular opposition to a new war in the Middle East, Obama eventually pulled back and in September accepted a face-saving deal brokered by Russian President Vladimir Putin for the supervised destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stocks.

The Syrian government denied responsibility for the Ghouta attack and blamed the "rebels," who had every

reason to carry out the action, which coincided with the arrival of United Nations weapons inspectors in Damascus to investigate previous gas attacks. At the time of the attack, Syrian government forces were retaking areas previously held by the US-backed opposition, which was in disarray and on the point of collapse. It desperately needed a supposed government atrocity to provide a pretext for direct US military intervention against the Assad regime.

Hersh's report substantiates the Syrian government's claims, using documents and accounts from US intelligence and military sources. It also provides evidence that President Obama, Secretary of State John Kerry and other US officials knowingly lied to the American people when they insisted that only the Assad regime could have carried out the Ghouta attack and that US intelligence agencies had proof that Syrian government forces were responsible. (See: New exposé by Seymour Hersh: Turkey staged gas attack to provoke US war on Syria)

Last December, Hersh published an initial account of the Ghouta attack, which noted the discrepancies and contradictions in the official US accounts and exposed media propaganda such as the now-retracted claim by the *New York Times* that its own technical analysis of the attack proved that only the Syrian military could have fired the gas shells. Hersh's conclusion at that time, reflected in the headline "Whose Sarin?" was that it was still unclear who was responsible for the gas attack.

The latest account provides an important new finding—that the Turkish government worked with the al-Nusra Front to engineer the gas attack and blame it on Assad in order to provide a means for the Obama administration to override popular opposition to another US war in the Middle East and launch military

action in Syria.

A former intelligence official told Hersh, “We now know it was a covert action planned by Erdogan’s people to push Obama over the red line ... They had to escalate to a gas attack in or near Damascus ... The deal was to do something spectacular.”

Hersh has been unable to get his reports published by major American media outlets. Both of his Syrian exposés appeared in the online edition of the *London Review of Books*, not in the *New Yorker*, where he was published for many years, or any daily newspaper.

Since the new article was posted early Sunday morning, there has been total silence in the mainstream US press. The *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, the two leading dailies, said nothing. The *Times* published a long account Monday of fighting in Syria with no mention of Hersh’s report.

The main British dailies have also been silent. The *Guardian*, in addition to censoring Hersh, published a long account of a self-justifying interview on BBC Radio 4 by the notorious liar and war criminal Tony Blair, the former prime minister, defending the Iraq war and advocating military action in Syria.

The article, written by the newspaper’s chief political correspondent Nicholas Watt, goes so far as to note Blair’s argument that the use of sarin gas at Ghouta was sufficient reason to attack Syria, without referencing Hersh’s exposure of this attack as a provocation, published just 24 hours earlier. The cover-up is conscious and deliberate.

The Turkish media has commented on the Hersh report with a blizzard of vituperation and attempts to defend the Erdogan government. This comes despite the fact that the government recently shut off access to YouTube after someone posted a video of a secret meeting of government officials at which the head of Turkish intelligence discussed staging another provocation inside Syria, such as an attack on a mosque, to provide a pretext for military intervention.

The web site of the Turkish newspaper *Zaman* published an email sent by the White House press office Sunday night, which read: “We have seen Mr. Hersh’s latest story, which is based solely on information from unnamed sources and which reaches conclusions about the August 21 chemical weapons attack in Syria that are completely off-base.” *Zaman* also cites “Turkish diplomatic sources” declaring,

“These claims are baseless. We do not take it seriously.”

The left-liberal magazine *Nation* commented briefly on Hersh’s first article on the Ghouta attack last December. The article by Greg Mitchell took a noncommittal position, declaring, “Hersh’s edgy investigative reporting is usually proven right, of course, but in recent years, one must admit, sometimes wrong. For myself, I’ve never claimed a belief that rebels, not the Assad forces, launched the attacks ...” The *Nation* has not commented on the latest Hersh report.

Also silent is the pseudo-left International Socialist Organization, which has campaigned relentlessly to portray the US stooges and Al Qaeda-linked terrorists in the Syrian “rebel” camp as a mass popular revolutionary movement. The ISO publication *Socialist Worker* swallowed the Ghouta provocation hook, line and sinker, and has not reported or commented on either of Hersh’s exposés on the question.



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