

Washington Post seizes on chemical weapons claims to press for wider war in Syria

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Two articles in Friday's *Washington Post* reporting chemical weapons attacks in Iraq and Syria are part of a general propaganda campaign by the mainstream media to turn the operation against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) into a war to overthrow the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

A front-page article headlined "Jihadist launched chemical assault" reports that ISIS forces deployed chlorine gas in an attack last month against Sunni police officers in the Iraqi city of Duluiyah, approximately 60 miles north of Baghdad. The officers reported being overcome by a cloud of yellow gas which hung low to the ground, consistent with chlorine gas. The attack reportedly sickened at least 11 officers who were taken to a nearby hospital and treated with oxygen and anti-inflammatory medication for shortness of breath.

According to the Iraq Defense Ministry, ISIS has obtained significant quantities chlorine from water treatment facilities where the chemical is used to chlorinate water to prevent the spread of water-borne disease. Improvised chlorine bombs were used previously by Al-Qaeda in Iraq, the predecessor of ISIS, at the height of the Sunni insurgency against the US occupation in 2006 and 2007.

There have been other reports in recent weeks of the use of chlorine gas by ISIS in Iraq. According to soldiers who managed to escape an ISIS attack last month on the Saqlawiyah military base in Anbar Province, chlorine gas was deployed as part of the brutal assault which killed approximately 370 soldiers. ISIS fighters reportedly fired chlorine gas canisters into the base.

The Al Nusra Front is suspected of being responsible for a chlorine gas attack in March of last year that killed 26 Syrians, including 16 Syrian soldiers. The Al Nusra Front seized control of the Sheikh Suleiman military base in western Aleppo as well as a chlorine factory at the end of 2012, giving them access to chemical weaponry.

Sheikh Suleimna, also known as Base 111, is believed to have been an important site in Syria's chemical weapons program.

The *Post's* editorial titled "Obama gives Syria's Assad another pass on chemical weapons," seizes on the recent reports of use of chlorine weapons by ISIS in Iraq to press for the overthrow of the Assad regime in Syria. "The Islamic State, too, may be using chlorine," the editorial states, but "the difference is that, while the United States has mobilized a coalition against the Islamic State, Mr. Assad is taking advantage of the fact that the U.S. strategy in Syria is to ignore him."

The paper states quite bluntly that "the Assad regime is once again blatantly violating the 'red line' drawn by Mr. Obama against the use of chemical weapons—and getting away with it." The editorial quotes Simon Limage, a State Department nonproliferation official, who said that the "evidence strongly suggests the Assad regime is the culprit."

The editorial cites a report published this week by the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), a Washington, D.C. think-tank which laid blame for 18 recent alleged chlorine gas attacks in rebel held areas on the Assad regime. The ISW was founded and is overseen by Kimberly Kagan, the sister-in-law of Robert Kagan, one of the founders of the neoconservative Project for a New American Century. Kimberly Kagan served as an advisor to Generals Stanley McChrystal and David Petraeus during President Barack Obama's surge in Afghanistan in 2009 and 2010.

The editorial concludes that Obama's refusal to establish a no-fly zone or target the Syrian military has given the Assad regime "a pass." The conclusion which the *Washington Post* intends for its readers draw is that a massive military campaign must be undertaken immediately to oust Assad.

Ironically this propaganda for war is published on the same day that the *Post's* news reporting vindicates earlier

exposures of the Western-backed “rebels” responsibility for chemical weapons attacks in Syria that were largely ignored by the mainstream media at the time.

UN special investigator Carla Del Ponte stated in May of last year that investigators had “strong, concrete suspicions” of the use of sarin gas “on the part of the opposition, the rebels, not by the government authorities.”

Plots by Al Qaeda in Iraq, the precursor to ISIS, and Al Qaeda’s affiliate in Syria, the Al Nusra Front, were broken up in May and June of last year. The groups were accused of planning to manufacture and deploy chemical weapons, including sarin and mustard gas.

The Iraqi Defense Ministry arrested five members of ISIS in Baghdad who were allegedly seeking to deploy chemical agents against crowds of Shia pilgrims via remote controlled planes. Turkish authorities claimed to have broken up a plot by the Al-Nusrah Front to launch a sarin gas attack either inside Syria or on the Incirlik Air Base in Turkey.

Pulitzer Prize winning investigative journalist Seymour Hersh exposed claims by the imperialist powers that Assad was responsible for a sarin gas attack on the rebel-held Damascus suburb of Ghouta in August last year as a calculated fraud. Hersh reported that Al Nusra also had the capability to deploy sarin gas in Syria but never came under suspicion from the US. This remarkable exposure of claims that had served as the principal pretext for the Obama administration’s aborted plan to launch air strikes against Syria at the time was subsequently buried by US media.

The *Washington Post* is seizing upon the most recent claims of chemical weapons attacks in Iraq and Syria as part of a cynical maneuver in the Obama administration’s drive to oust the Assad regime. The yellow press is churning out this propaganda in an attempt to prepare the general population for an escalation of the current military operations against ISIS into an all-out war for regime change in Syria.



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