

US military-intelligence apparatus presses for further strikes on Syria

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A US military intelligence report leaked to the corporate media makes the claim that the April 14 missile strikes carried out by Washington in conjunction with both the UK and France have failed to destroy the Syrian government's alleged chemical weapons capabilities. It makes the implicit case for more extensive and deadly raids that could trigger a military confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia, which has troops in Syria backing the forces of President Bashar al-Assad.

The leaking of the report, which was featured by the *New York Times* under the headline "Missile Strikes Are Unlikely to Stop Syria's Chemical Attacks, Pentagon Says", and covered extensively by Reuters, came amid new reporting from the scene of the alleged chemical weapons attack that was the pretext for the April 14 missile strikes on Syria, exposing the incident as a fabrication.

Russian television broadcaster VGTRK interviewed a Syrian boy who featured prominently in a video posted by a "rebel" group that constituted the principal "evidence" of a chemical attack in the Eastern Ghouta city of Douma on April 7, which was invoked by Washington, London and Paris as the *casus belli* for an unprovoked act of military aggression carried out in flagrant violation of international law.

In the video filmed by the British and US-funded, and Al Qaeda-linked, "NGO," the White Helmets, the boy is seen amid a chaotic scene of screaming adults and panic-stricken children being hosed down with water to counter the effects of the supposed chemical attack.

Speaking to the Russian television crew, 11-year-old Hassan Diab confirmed that he was the boy in the video. "Somebody was shouting that we had to go to the hospital, so we went there," he said "When I came in, some people grabbed me and started pouring water over my head."

His father, who like other residents of Douma said he had heard nothing about a chemical attack that day, told the Russian broadcaster: "I went to the hospital, walked upstairs, and found my wife and children. I asked them what had happened, and they said people outside were shouting about some smell, and told them to go to the hospital. At the hospital, they gave dates and cookies to the kids."

The TV crew also interviewed medical personnel at the clinic where the video was filmed. One of them said that while people had turned up complaining of respiratory problems caused by dust from bombings in the city, he was surprised by the sudden influx

of patients accompanied by the White Helmets film crew.

He recounted: "Some people came here and washed people. They said: 'Chemical attack. Chemical attack.' We didn't see any chemical attack symptoms."

A similar account was provided by a very different source, the right-wing pro-Trump US cable network USNN, which also managed to get a TV crew into Douma. Its correspondent reported that after interviewing some 40 residents, "Not one of the people I spoke to in the neighborhood [where the attack allegedly occurred] said that they had seen anything or heard anything about a chemical attack on that day."

USNN also spoke to medical personnel at the clinic where the "rebel" video was filmed. One of them told the cable broadcaster that it had been a routine day until, "Suddenly, out of nowhere... a bunch of strangers burst into the room screaming that there was a chemical attack. They brought in alleged victims and started hosing them down with water."

He added that the "strangers" were videotaping everything. "As soon as they washed everybody off, they packed up and they left."

The doctors reported that they "didn't see any indication of a chemical attack" and that the people brought in looked "totally normal," with none of the symptoms of being affected by a chemical agent such as chlorine or sarin. The head surgeon at the clinic also reported that on the day of the alleged attack, the facility recorded "zero deaths."

The report by the right-wing US broadcaster also featured video of massive stockpiles of mortar shells and other weaponry found in Douma after the evacuation of the Al Qaeda-linked rebels, which the reporter recounted reached, in some cases, from the "floor to the ceiling."

These reports largely echo the earlier account provided by the veteran British Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk of the *Independent*, who also reached Douma and interviewed a senior doctor at the medical clinic. The physician said a "White Helmet" had burst into the clinic shouting "Gas" and triggering a panic, which was then filmed by the group's videographers. The doctor told Fisk that no one there was affected by gas poisoning.

The US, Britain and France have all claimed that they have proof that the Syrian government carried out a chemical weapons attack on April 7, but have yet to make public a shred of evidence.

Nor have they indicated what possible motive the Assad government, which has crushed the Al Qaeda-linked "rebels" in the Damascus suburbs of Eastern Ghouta, would have for using

chemical weapons on a population that was largely hostile to these Western-backed forces at the close of the Syrian military's successful campaign.

The motive for fabricating such an attack, on the other hand, is obvious. It provided the pretext for a coordinated campaign by the US and its European allies that had been planned and organized long before April 7.

The latest reports from Douma have further underscored the criminal and corrupt role played by the US and Western corporate media, which has faithfully served as a propaganda conduit for the US-led war drive, while dismissing the mounting reports from the scene exposing the chemical weapons attack as a hoax as "conspiracy theories."

Using the fake chemical weapons incident as a means of casting an act of imperialist aggression as a crusade for "human rights," US, British and French imperialism launched the missile attack of April 14. This was part of a desperate bid to counter the strategic defeat suffered by the Islamist militias that the US and the other Western powers, along with the Saudis and other Gulf oil monarchies, have backed with billions of dollars in arms and funding since the CIA-orchestrated war for regime-change began in 2011. The last of the "rebels" withdrew from Eastern Ghouta just hours after the missile strikes. Civilians who remained have denounced the Western-backed militias as "terrorists" who deprived them of food and medicine and summarily executed anyone who opposed them.

Among the targets struck by American, French and British missiles was the Barzah Research and Development center, which Western intelligence agencies claimed was involved in chemical weapons production. Employees of the facility, however, reported that its work was developing chemical formulas for cancer drugs—in short supply because of the US and EU embargo against Syria—as well as antidotes for snake bites and scorpion stings that were distributed throughout the region. The research center, which has been repeatedly inspected and cleared by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), was largely demolished.

OPCW investigators sent to Douma have reportedly been unable to reach the site because of security issues, including coming under small arms fire on Wednesday. The Western powers and the "rebels" they support on the ground in Syria have a clear motive for impeding even the semblance of an independent investigation that fails to come up with any evidence of the chemical attack invoked as justification for military aggression.

The unraveling of the official story of the events in Douma and the leaking of the US military intelligence report are no doubt more than coincidental.

The *Times* led its article on the report by stating that it concluded "the Syrian government is expected to resume its chemical weapons program, despite President Trump saying 'mission accomplished.'"

Reuters said the report concluded that the missile strikes "had only a limited impact on President Bashar al-Assad's ability to carry out chemical weapons attacks."

The news agency went on to cite "US and allied intelligence" sources as claiming that chemical weapons were being "stored in

schools and apartment buildings," which one of the officials referred to as 'human shields.'"

This reference is particularly ominous, providing what is effectively an advance alibi for future US attacks killing large numbers of Syrian civilians.

In sync with the US military and intelligence apparatus, the Democratic Party is pressing for an escalation of the US war in Syria. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi held a press conference Thursday revealing that the House Democratic Caucus had held a meeting the day before to discuss how to unite the US Congress around the drafting of a new authorization for the use of military force (AUMF) to replace the one passed in 2001 in the wake of the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington. That legislation, directed against Al Qaeda, clearly does not cover military operations against the Assad government in Syria, which has been battling US-backed Al Qaeda affiliates.

The Democrats, along with the predominant layers among Congressional Republicans, are pressing for the Trump White House to pursue a more aggressive military confrontation with both Syria and its principal allies, Russia and Iran, and to abandon Trump's recent pledge to "bring the troops back home" from Syria.

"The policy is clear, the ability to achieve it is not," said the House Armed Services Committee's top Democrat, Rep. Adam Smith of Washington in a C-SPAN interview Thursday. "I don't think lobbing missiles once a year, saying 'mission accomplished' and calling it good is going to achieve that policy objective."

The "policy" Smith referred to is the overthrow of the Assad government in furtherance of the unfettered US domination of the oil-rich and strategically vital Middle East. With over 2,000 US troops—supplemented by proxy forces recruited from the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia—occupying a third of Syria, including its main oil and gas fields, decisive layers within the US political establishment, spearheaded by the Democrats, are demanding a far more aggressive military policy that threatens to unleash a massive war with devastating consequences for humanity.



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