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CHEM NEWS

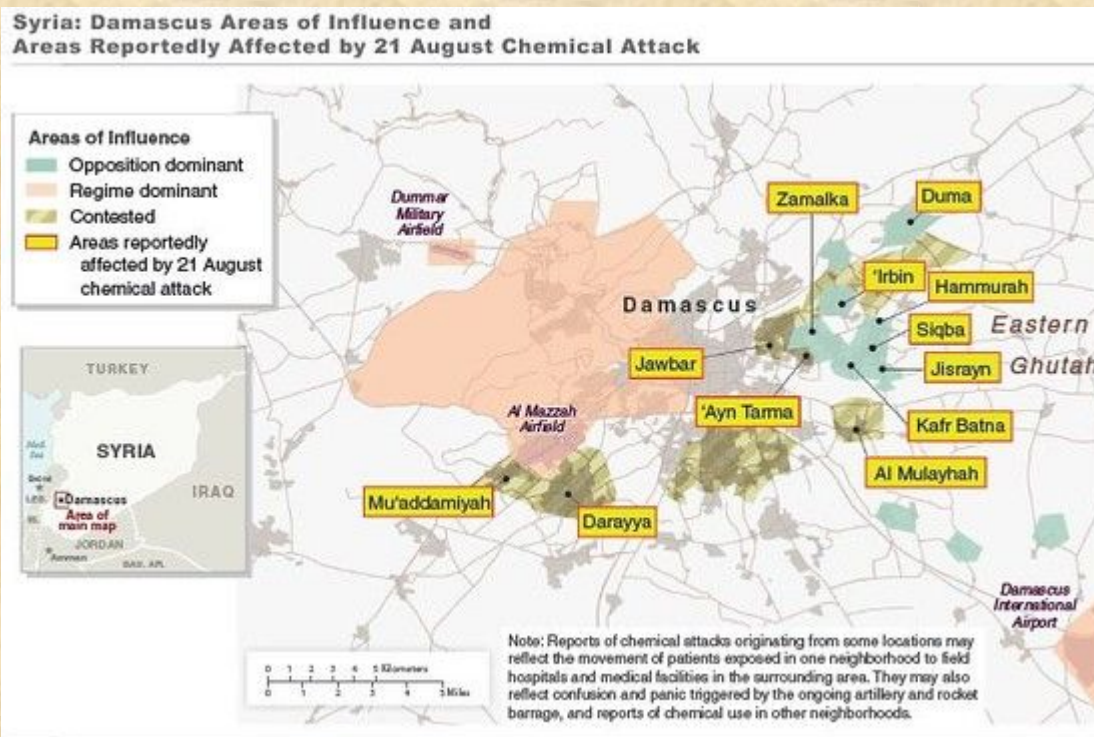
Humanity defeated ...
Does it matter
who released them?



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Text of U.S. Assessment on Syria's Use of Chemical Weapons

Source: <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2013/08/30/text-of-u-s-assessment-on-syrias-use-of-chemical-weapons/>



Here's the text of the White House assessment of Syria's use of chemical weapons last week. Secretary of State John Kerry, in remarks at the State Department, said the "findings are as compelling as they are clear."

U.S. Government Assessment of the Syrian Government's



Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21, 2013

The United States Government assesses with high confidence that the Syrian government carried out a chemical weapons attack in the Damascus suburbs on August 21, 2013. We further assess that the regime used a nerve agent in the attack. These all-source assessments are based on human, signals, and geospatial intelligence as well as a significant body of open source reporting. Our classified assessments have been shared with the U.S. Congress and key international partners. To protect sources and methods, we cannot publicly release all available intelligence – but what follows is an unclassified summary of the U.S. Intelligence Community's analysis of what took place.

Syrian Government Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21

A large body of independent sources indicates that a chemical weapons attack took place in the Damascus suburbs on August 21. In addition to U.S. intelligence information, there are accounts from international and Syrian medical personnel; videos; witness accounts; thousands of social media reports from at least 12 different locations in the Damascus area; journalist accounts; and reports from highly credible nongovernmental organizations.



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A preliminary U.S. government assessment determined that 1,429 people were killed in the chemical weapons attack, including at least 426 children, though this assessment will certainly evolve as we obtain more information.

We assess with high confidence that the Syrian government carried out the chemical weapons attack against opposition elements in the Damascus suburbs on August 21. We assess that the scenario in which the opposition executed the attack on August 21 is highly unlikely. The body of information used to make this assessment includes intelligence pertaining to the regime's preparations for this attack and its means of delivery, multiple streams of intelligence about the attack itself and its effect, our post-attack observations, and the differences between the capabilities of the regime and the opposition. Our high confidence assessment is the strongest position that the U.S. Intelligence Community can take short of confirmation. We will continue to seek additional information to close gaps in our understanding of what took place. 2

Background:

The Syrian regime maintains a stockpile of numerous chemical agents, including mustard, sarin, and VX and has thousands of munitions that can be used to deliver chemical warfare agents.

Syrian President Bashar al-Asad is the ultimate decision maker for the chemical weapons program and members of the program are carefully vetted to ensure security and loyalty. The Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC) – which is subordinate to the Syrian Ministry of Defense – manages Syria's chemical weapons program.

We assess with high confidence that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons on a small scale against the opposition multiple times in the last year, including in the Damascus suburbs. This assessment is based on multiple streams of information including reporting of Syrian officials planning and executing chemical weapons attacks and laboratory analysis of physiological samples obtained from a number of individuals, which revealed exposure to sarin. We assess that the opposition has not used chemical weapons.

The Syrian regime has the types of munitions that we assess were used to carry out the attack on August 21, and has the ability to strike simultaneously in multiple locations. We have seen no indication that the opposition has carried out a large-scale, coordinated rocket and artillery attack like the one that occurred on August 21.

We assess that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons over the last year primarily to gain the upper hand or break a stalemate in areas where it has struggled to seize and hold strategically valuable territory. In this regard, we continue to judge that the Syrian regime views chemical weapons as one of many tools in its arsenal, including air power and ballistic missiles, which they indiscriminately use against the opposition.

The Syrian regime has initiated an effort to rid the Damascus suburbs of opposition forces using the area as a base to stage attacks against regime targets in the capital. The regime has failed to clear dozens of Damascus neighborhoods of opposition elements, including neighborhoods targeted on August 21, despite employing nearly all of its conventional weapons systems. We assess that the regime's frustration with its inability to secure large portions of Damascus may have contributed to its decision to use chemical weapons on August 21.3

Preparation:

We have intelligence that leads us to assess that Syrian chemical weapons personnel – including personnel assessed to be associated with the SSRC – were preparing chemical munitions prior to the attack. In the three days prior to the attack, we collected streams of human, signals and geospatial intelligence that reveal regime activities that we assess were associated with preparations for a chemical weapons attack.

Syrian chemical weapons personnel were operating in the Damascus suburb of 'Adra from Sunday, August 18 until early in the morning on Wednesday, August 21 near an area that the regime uses to mix chemical weapons, including sarin. On August 21, a Syrian regime element prepared for a chemical weapons attack in the Damascus area, including through the utilization of gas masks. Our intelligence sources in the Damascus area did not detect any indications in the days prior to the attack that opposition affiliates were planning to use chemical weapons.



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The Attack:

Multiple streams of intelligence indicate that the regime executed a rocket and artillery attack against the Damascus suburbs in the early hours of August 21. Satellite detections corroborate that attacks from a regime-controlled area struck neighborhoods where the chemical attacks reportedly occurred – including Kafr Batna, Jawbar, 'Ayn Tarma, Darayya, and Mu'addamiyah. This includes the detection of rocket launches from regime controlled territory early in the morning, approximately 90 minutes before the first report of a chemical attack appeared in social media. The lack of flight activity or missile launches also leads us to conclude that the regime used rockets in the attack.



Local social media reports of a chemical attack in the Damascus suburbs began at 2:30 a.m. local time on August 21. Within the next four hours there were thousands of social media reports on this attack from at least 12 different locations in the Damascus area. Multiple accounts described chemical-filled rockets impacting opposition-controlled areas.

Three hospitals in the Damascus area received approximately 3,600 patients displaying symptoms consistent with nerve agent exposure in less than three hours on the morning of August 21, according to a highly credible international humanitarian organization. The reported symptoms, and the epidemiological pattern of events – characterized by the massive influx of patients in a short period of time, the origin of the patients, and the contamination of medical and first aid workers – were consistent with mass exposure to a nerve agent. We also received reports from international and Syrian medical personnel on the ground.⁴

We have identified one hundred videos attributed to the attack, many of which show large numbers of bodies exhibiting physical signs consistent with, but not unique to, nerve agent exposure. The reported symptoms of victims included unconsciousness, foaming from the nose and mouth, constricted pupils, rapid heartbeat, and difficulty breathing. Several of the videos show what appear to be numerous fatalities with no visible injuries, which is consistent with death from chemical weapons, and inconsistent with death from small-arms, high-explosive munitions or blister agents. At least 12 locations are portrayed in the publicly available videos, and a sampling of those videos confirmed that some were shot at the general times and locations described in the footage.

We assess the Syrian opposition does not have the capability to fabricate all of the videos, physical symptoms verified by medical personnel and NGOs, and other information associated with this chemical attack.

We have a body of information, including past Syrian practice, that leads us to conclude that regime officials were witting of and directed the attack on August 21. We intercepted communications involving a senior official intimately familiar with the offensive who confirmed that chemical weapons were used by the regime on August 21 and was concerned with the U.N. inspectors obtaining evidence. On the afternoon of August 21, we have intelligence that Syrian chemical weapons personnel were directed to cease operations. At the same time, the regime intensified the artillery barrage targeting many of the neighborhoods where chemical attacks occurred. In the 24 hour period after the attack, we detected indications of artillery and rocket fire at a rate approximately four times higher than the ten preceding days. We continued to see indications of sustained shelling in the neighborhoods up until the morning of August 26.

To conclude, there is a substantial body of information that implicates the Syrian government's responsibility in the chemical weapons attack that took place on August 21. As indicated, there is additional intelligence that remains classified because of sources and methods concerns that is being provided to Congress and international partners.



Chemical Warfare Forensics and the Damascus Problem

By Dan Kaszeta

Source: <http://strongpointsecurity.co.uk/site/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Kaszeta-CW-Forensics.pdf>



Introduction

It would appear that a toxic substance of some description has been used to kill civilians in the outskirts of Damascus. Great hope has been vested in the ability of a small United Nations (UN) investigative team, but there are both practical and theoretical limits to what can be expected of such a small team working in such a complex environment. The purpose of this brief paper is to highlight the practical limitations of an investigation in this environment. Establishing the who and the why in this situation will be made much easier if the what and the how are established. This paper is not meant to replace any practical guide or manual. I strongly suggest that readers seek out the works of Steven C. Drielak, who has written several works in this area that I consider to be canonical references. Also, there are numerous safety precautions that need to be observed. This type of investigation poses many dangers to life and health, and I do not have time to list them all or to advise the necessary precautions and countermeasures. Nor do I have time to provide a basic overview of fundamental forensic procedures. These can be found in many references.

Obstacles to this type of investigation

Damascus is an ongoing active war zone. Wars are, by definition, full of charged politics and strong opinions. This is a challenging environment in which virtually every circumstance conspires against the ability to conduct an effective investigation.

The following points illustrate how savagely difficult this business can be and represent the basic obstacles to hinder the investigation.

1. Transitory nature of chemical evidence – Chemical warfare agents evaporate or degrade in the environment. Capturing a sample of gas or vapor isn't easy even five minutes after it was released. Gases and vapors drift away with the wind. Liquid agents evaporate. Most CWAs suffer from hydrolysis (reaction with water). Traces of biomarkers in blood and urine do not last forever after an incident.

2. Passage of time erodes any crime scene, large or small. This is a fundamental tenet of criminal investigation. Things that were in the crime scene can be taken away, deliberately or inadvertently. Things can be introduced into the crime scene that were not there during the incident. The passage of any amount of time between incident and collection of evidence gives scope for many potential issues, such as degradation of evidence, tampering or removal of evidence, or loss of witnesses.

3. Size and scope of the crime scene. The size of the crime scene is large. And it is populated with many people coming and going. The traditional concept of trying to secure the scene(s) of the incident simply flies out the window in this type of environment. The size of the incident means that a full investigation could easily eat up the services of over a hundred investigators, a figure that is logistically unreasonable in this circumstance.

4. Threats to the safety of the investigators. The fact that Damascus is an active war zone means that investigators lack the ability to operate freely and unencumbered. The investigators may be accompanied by security teams that may members of or who may be sympathetic to one side or another in the conflict. An unsafe environment adds to stress on the investigators, which can detract from their efficiency and lead to increased probability of errors.

5. Conventional warfare will damage or destroy evidence. The active and prolific use of conventional munitions means that many items of evidence may have been destroyed. Witnesses die or flee.

6. Proper procedures are hard to follow in an active war zone. The forensically correct procedures in normal use in a criminal investigation are difficult to follow in a war zone. Any reader will note that there will be a significant degree to which these procedures simply cannot apply in a situation such as this most recent incident.



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7. Politics. War is an extension of politics. It is impossible to ignore the political aspects of the situation. Some people clearly have made their minds up as to what happened, regardless of the physical findings.

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8. Distance to support – Property laboratory support is very far from the scene of the incidents. Most of the work that a field team can do is presumptive rather than definitive. A competent and well-equipped laboratory needs to backstop the field team. In addition, a competent investigation will use a large volume of expendable materials, which could take days to resupply.

Types of Evidence – What to look for

Several have asked me what I would do if I was in charge of the investigation (and I am grateful that I am not), and if I had unlimited resources and access (available only in a fantasy world, I fear). The following types of samples can be taken:

- Solid (including powders and soil)
- Liquid
- Aerosol / Vapor / Gas
- Surface
- Dermal (i.e. residue on skin)

I would look to collect the following evidence, in approximate priority order:

1. An actual sample of the causative agent. If at all possible, investigators need to find the murder weapon. What chemical substance(s) caused this catastrophe? As we seem to be looking for a gas or vapor, this will be difficult. It is also important to note the presence of any. In this case, I would take multiple air samples using Tedlar bags and thermal desorption tubes. Some of the things I would focus on:

- a. Corners and crevices in rooms and low lying areas where the attacks have occurred.
- b. The head-space of any bag or container containing rubbish from the time of the attack, with particular attention to any bag or container containing clothing, expended medical items or anything wet from decontamination water.
- c. Shoes of anyone who handled or treated victims.
- d. Gloves used by anyone who handled or treated victims.
- e. Any trapped air in burial shrouds or coffins of deceased victims.
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- d. Gloves used by anyone who handled or treated victims.
- e. Any trapped air in burial shrouds or coffins of deceased victims.
- f. Dermal swabs of deceased victims.
- g. Water in drains at any of the sites where victims were decontaminated. U-bends and traps in pipes and drains may contain some residue of a liquid chemical agent.
- h. Soil around any potential device or munition that is found that may have contained chemicals.
- i. Background samples of air, soil, and water, from areas of the city where no victims were reported and no alleged chemical incidents occurred, for purposes of comparison.

2. We need to find the means of dispersal. How did the chemical material turn up? How was it dispensed? There needs to be a full search for expended ordnance or devices that may have been the causative agent. Intact or nearly intact devices are ideal, but need to be handled with utmost care. Fragments are better than nothing. Devices that



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cannot be retrieved should be photographed, geo-located precisely, and measured. Swabs and samples should be taken prior to collection. The orientation of the device or fragments should be noted. Any device in the ground should be accompanied by samples of the soil, as well as a measurement as to how deep the munition was impacted into the soil. Unknown fragments that look like they could be part of a device or munition are of interest as well.

Look for any of the following, in whole or part:

- a. Rocket
- b. Missile warhead
- c. Bomblet/ submunitions
- d. Artillery shell
- e. Mortar shell
- f. Spray tank
- g. Aerial bomb
- h. Gas cylinders
- i. Grenades
- j. Any abandoned or wrecked tanker trucks

3. Medical evidence. Medical samples need to be collected from evidence from alleged victims of the atrocity.

- a. Blood
- b. Hair, to include samples from beards
- c. Urine
- d. Vomit
- e. Saliva and nasal secretions
- f. Any clothing that would have been contaminated

4. Post-mortem evidence. Every effort should be made to obtain the bodies of deceased victims of the incident for analysis by competent forensic pathologists.

5. Photo/Video evidence: Do victims have video or still photo evidence from the attack? Of particular note are videos or photos that were not uploaded to media sites such as YouTube. Every effort should be made to note the time and place of the video or photo. Videos and photos that cannot be correlated with time or place are of limited investigative value.

6. Witness statements. Witness statements should be collected with as much detail as possible. If possible, interview witnesses in isolation from each other to obtain independent accounts. Some information that will be of investigative interest include:

- a. Location of the victim at the time of the attack. Investigators should start building a map. Such a map could identify buildings or areas where large clusters of victims were affected, which should, in turn, be areas of priority focus for physical evidence collection.
- b. How far above or below ground was the victim at the time of onset of symptoms or when they noticed a chemical substance. This can help to establish the vapor density of the chemical substance, i.e. was it lighter or heavier than air?
- c. Odor/smell. Did the odor go away or persist? This is useful, as some chemicals eventually eradicate the victim's ability to smell them.
- d. Medical signs and symptoms. What signs and symptoms did the victim suffer from? Use precise language.
- e. Sounds heard at the time. Explosions, popping noises, silence? Different types of dissemination device may be associated with different sounds.
- f. Duration of symptoms. How long did the symptoms last?
- g. Delayed onset. Was there any delay in the onset of symptoms?

7. Weather data from the time of the incident. Meteorological data from the time of the incident(s) should be retrieved. Bear in mind that general wind speed and direction data may not be easily applicable to the exact locations of investigative interest. In this particular



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circumstance. It is unlikely that this data will be of the quality needed for any but the most basic assumptions.

A few points on crime scene procedure

It would take me too long to encapsulate the world's best practices for crime scene investigation, and that would be beyond the scope of what I am trying to do here. There are many useful books in this subject. But some of the fundamental tenets of evidence preservation and collection are identified here in summary form, if for no other reason than to demonstrate just how difficult this business can be.

1. Investigator safety is important. We are talking about dangerous materials and devices. A dead investigator can't help anyone.
2. An unsecured crime scene leaves room for skullduggery.
3. Cross-contamination is the enemy of good forensic science. Boots, gloves, clothing, and related items may transfer contamination.
4. There are good, well accepted procedures for collecting, storing, preserving, and transporting every type of evidence above. There's no excuse for not looking up these procedures and following them.
5. Sterile gloves, tools and containers must be used to collect samples. The process by which sterilization took place and was verified must be documented. Using the same dirty shovel to collect soil in ten different places means that if you find something in one of the samples, you might find it in all of the samples, even if it wasn't actually there in the first place.
6. Everything, and I mean everything that the investigators do must be documented.
7. Chain of custody is critical. If you can't account for where a sample has been, then it could be planted, faked, or tampered with.

Notes

1. I certainly agree to fair use and distribution of this paper for information purposes. However, I hold the copyright on it. Please do not reproduce this for commercial purposes.
2. Observe necessary EOD (explosive ordnance disposal) and chemical safety precautions at all times.
3. This paper is entirely composed of the author's opinions.
4. This paper was finished on 28 August 2013 and reflects situations as of that date.

Dan Kaszeta is the author of "CBRN and Hazmat Incidents at Major Public Events: Planning and Response" (Wiley, 2012) as well as a number of magazine articles and conference papers. He has 22 years of experience in CBRN, having served as an officer in the US Army Chemical Corps, as CBRN advisor for the White House Military Office, and as a specialist in the US Secret Service. He now runs Strongpoint Security, a London-based CBRN and antiterrorism consultancy and is also a Senior Research Fellow with the International Institute of Nonproliferation Studies. Dan is also a senior analyst with the online simulation site Wikistrat.

Read also:

What Happened? If it isn't Sarin, what is it?

<http://strongpointsecurity.co.uk/site/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Revised-Thoughts-on-Damascus.pdf>

Frequently Asked Questions about Sarin (GB)

<http://strongpointsecurity.co.uk/site/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/QA-regarding-Sarin.pdf>

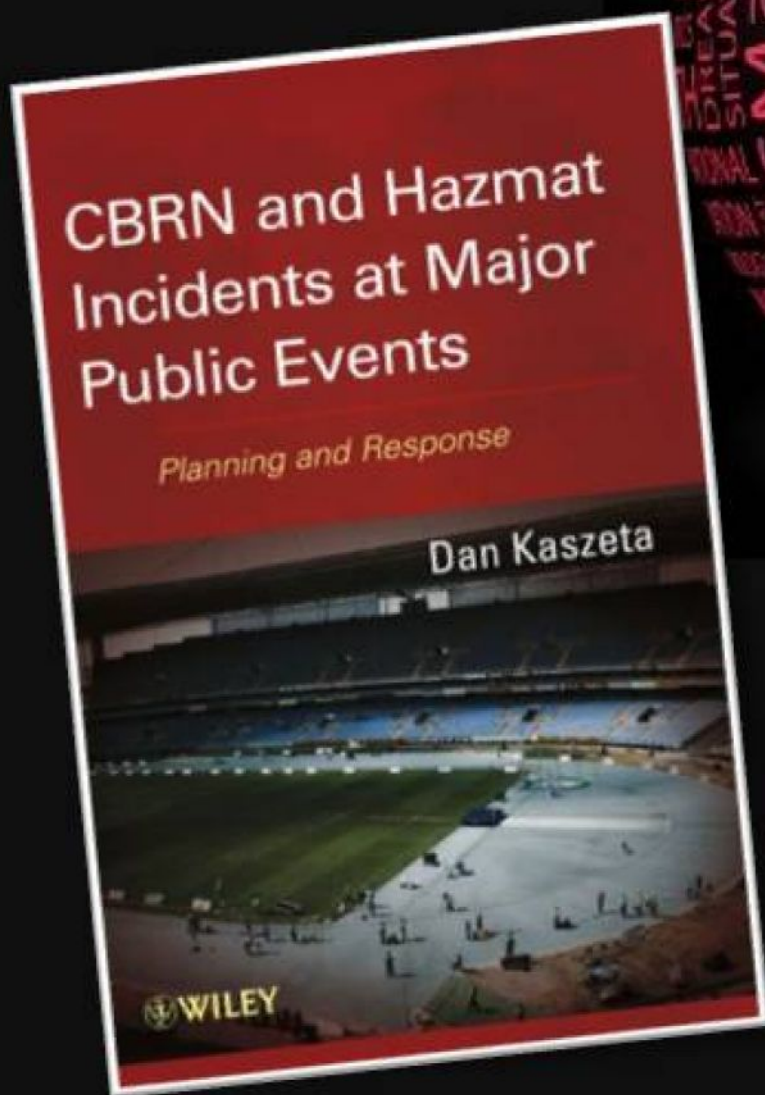
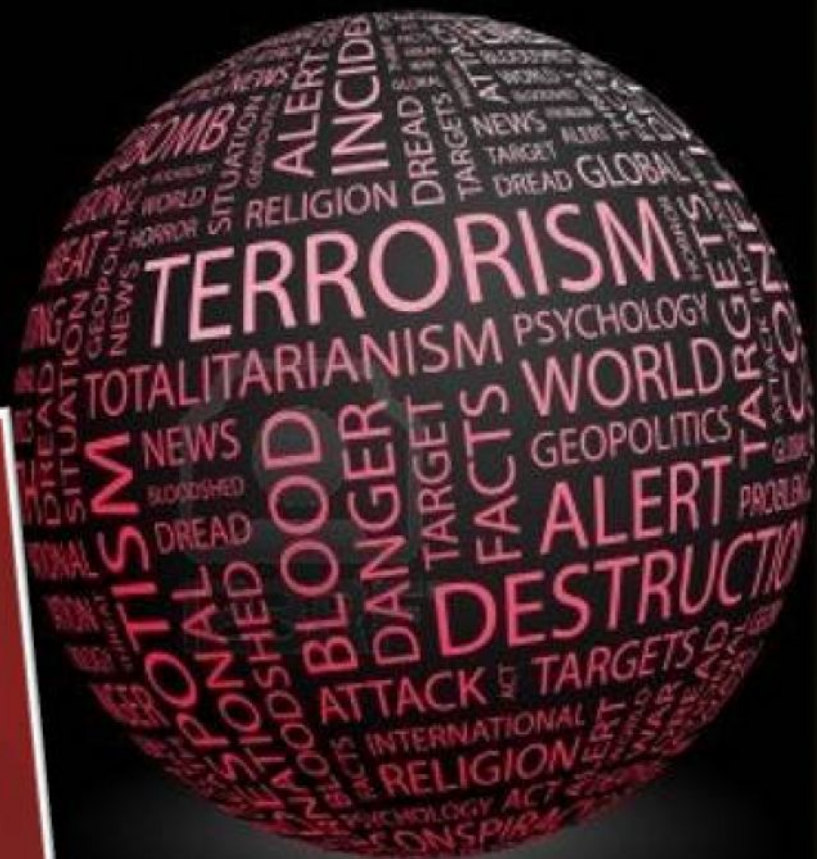




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Obama Warned on Syrian Intel

September 6, 2013

Source: <http://consortiumnews.com/2013/09/06/obama-warned-on-syrian-intel/>

Despite the Obama administration's supposedly "high confidence" regarding Syrian government guilt over the Aug. 21 chemical attack near Damascus, a dozen former U.S. military and intelligence officials are telling President Obama that they are picking up information that undercuts the Official Story.

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President**FROM:** Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)**SUBJECT:** Is Syria a Trap?**Precedence:** IMMEDIATE

We regret to inform you that some of our former co-workers are telling us, categorically, that contrary to the claims of your

discussion beyond ... the circle of those advisers clearly bent on a war for which we see no compelling reason and from which we believe the unintended consequences are likely to be catastrophic." We offer you the same advice today.

Our sources confirm that a chemical incident of some sort did cause fatalities and injuries on August 21 in a suburb of Damascus. They insist, however, that the incident was not the result of an attack by the Syrian Army using military-grade chemical weapons from its arsenal. That is the most salient fact, according to CIA officers working on the Syria

issue. They tell us that CIA Director John Brennan is perpetrating a pre-Iraq-War-type fraud on members of Congress, the media, the public – and perhaps even you.

We have observed John Brennan closely over recent years and, sadly, we find what our former colleagues are now telling us easy to believe. Sadder still, this goes in spades for those of us who have worked with him personally; we give him zero credence. And that goes, as well, for his titular boss, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, who has admitted he gave "clearly erroneous" sworn testimony to Congress denying NSA eavesdropping on Americans.

Intelligence Summary or Political Ploy?

That Secretary of State John Kerry would invoke Clapper's name this week in Congressional testimony, in an apparent attempt to enhance the credibility of the four-page



administration, the most reliable intelligence shows that Bashar al-Assad was NOT responsible for the chemical incident that killed and injured Syrian civilians on August 21, and that British intelligence officials also know this. In writing this brief report, we choose to assume that you have not been fully informed because your advisers decided to afford you the opportunity for what is commonly known as "plausible denial."

We have been down this road before – with President George W. Bush, to whom we addressed our first VIPS memorandum immediately after Colin Powell's Feb. 5, 2003 U.N. speech, in which he peddled fraudulent "intelligence" to support attacking Iraq. Then, also, we chose to give President Bush the benefit of the doubt, thinking he was being misled – or, at the least, very poorly advised.

The fraudulent nature of Powell's speech was a no-brainer. And so, that very afternoon we strongly urged your predecessor to "widen the



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“Government Assessment” strikes us as odd. The more so, since it was, for some unexplained reason, not Clapper but the White House that released the “assessment.”

This is not a fine point. We know how these things are done. Although the “Government Assessment” is being sold to the media as an “intelligence summary,” it is a political, not an intelligence document. The drafters, massagers, and fixers avoided presenting essential detail. Moreover, they conceded upfront that, though they pinned “high confidence” on the assessment, it still fell “short of confirmation.”

Déjà Fraud: This brings a flashback to the famous Downing Street Minutes of July 23, 2002, on Iraq. The minutes record the Richard Dearlove, then head of British intelligence, reporting to Prime Minister Tony Blair and other senior officials that President Bush had decided to remove Saddam Hussein through military action that would be “justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD.” Dearlove had gotten the word from then-CIA Director George Tenet whom he visited at CIA headquarters on July 20.

The discussion that followed centered on the ephemeral nature of the evidence, prompting Dearlove to explain: “But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy.” We are concerned that this is precisely what has happened with the “intelligence” on Syria.

The Intelligence

There is a growing body of evidence from numerous sources in the Middle East — mostly affiliated with the Syrian opposition and its supporters — providing a strong circumstantial case that the August 21 chemical incident was a pre-planned provocation by the Syrian opposition and its Saudi and Turkish supporters. The aim is reported to have been to create the kind of incident that would bring the United States into the war.

According to some reports, canisters containing chemical agent were brought into a suburb of Damascus, where they were then opened. Some people in the immediate vicinity died; others were injured.

We are unaware of any reliable evidence that a Syrian military rocket capable of carrying a chemical agent was fired into the area. In fact, we are aware of no reliable physical evidence to support the claim that this was a result of a

strike by a Syrian military unit with expertise in chemical weapons.

In addition, we have learned that on August 13-14, 2013, Western-sponsored opposition forces in Turkey started advance preparations for a major, irregular military surge. Initial meetings between senior opposition military commanders and Qatari, Turkish and U.S. intelligence officials took place at the converted Turkish military garrison in Antakya, Hatay Province, now used as the command center and headquarters of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and their foreign sponsors.

Senior opposition commanders who came from Istanbul pre-briefed the regional commanders on an imminent escalation in the fighting due to “a war-changing development,” which, in turn, would lead to a U.S.-led bombing of Syria.

At operations coordinating meetings at Antakya, attended by senior Turkish, Qatari and U.S. intelligence officials as well as senior commanders of the Syrian opposition, the Syrians were told that the bombing would start in a few days. Opposition leaders were ordered to prepare their forces quickly to exploit the U.S. bombing, march into Damascus, and remove the Bashar al-Assad government.

The Qatari and Turkish intelligence officials assured the Syrian regional commanders that they would be provided with plenty of weapons for the coming offensive. And they were. A weapons distribution operation unprecedented in scope began in all opposition camps on August 21-23. The weapons were distributed from storehouses controlled by Qatari and Turkish intelligence under the tight supervision of U.S. intelligence officers.

Cui bono?

That the various groups trying to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad have ample incentive to get the U.S. more deeply involved in support of that effort is clear. Until now, it has not been quite as clear that the Netanyahu government in Israel has equally powerful incentive to get Washington more deeply engaged in yet another war in the area. But with outspoken urging coming from Israel and those Americans who lobby for Israeli interests, this priority Israeli objective is becoming crystal clear.

Reporter Judi Rudoren, writing from Jerusalem in an important article in Friday's New York Times addresses Israeli motivation in an uncommonly



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candid way. Her article, titled “Israel Backs Limited Strike Against Syria,” notes that the Israelis have argued, quietly, that the best outcome for Syria’s two-and-a-half-year-old civil war, at least for the moment, is no outcome. Rudoren continues:

“For Jerusalem, the status quo, horrific as it may be from a humanitarian perspective, seems preferable to either a victory by Mr. Assad’s government and his Iranian backers or a strengthening of rebel groups, increasingly dominated by Sunni jihadis.

“This is a playoff situation in which you need both teams to lose, but at least you don’t want one to win — we’ll settle for a tie,’ said Alon Pinkas, a former Israeli consul general in New York. ‘Let them both bleed, hemorrhage to death: that’s the strategic thinking here. As long as this lingers, there’s no real threat from Syria.”

We think this is the way Israel’s current leaders look at the situation in Syria, and that deeper U.S. involvement – albeit, initially, by “limited” military strikes – is likely to ensure that there is no early resolution of the conflict in Syria. The longer Sunni and Shia are at each other’s throats in Syria and in the wider region, the safer Israel calculates that it is.

That Syria’s main ally is Iran, with whom it has a mutual defense treaty, also plays a role in Israeli calculations. Iran’s leaders are not likely to be able to have much military impact in Syria, and Israel can highlight that as an embarrassment for Tehran.

Iran’s Role

Iran can readily be blamed by association and charged with all manner of provocation, real and imagined. Some have seen Israel’s hand in the provenance of the most damaging charges against Assad regarding chemical

weapons and our experience suggests to us that such is supremely possible.

Possible also is a false-flag attack by an interested party resulting in the sinking or damaging, say, of one of the five U.S. destroyers now on patrol just west of Syria. Our mainstream media could be counted on to milk that for all it’s worth, and you would find yourself under still more pressure to widen U.S. military involvement in Syria – and perhaps beyond, against Iran.

Iran has joined those who blame the Syrian rebels for the August 21 chemical incident, and has been quick to warn the U.S. not to get more deeply involved. According to the Iranian English-channel Press TV, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javid Zarif has claimed: “The Syria crisis is a trap set by Zionist pressure groups for [the United States].”

Actually, he may be not far off the mark. But we think your advisers may be chary of entertaining this notion. Thus, we see as our continuing responsibility to try to get word to you so as to ensure that you and other decision makers are given the full picture.

Inevitable Retaliation

We hope your advisers have warned you that retaliation for attacks on Syrian are not a matter of IF, but rather WHERE and WHEN. Retaliation is inevitable. For example, terrorist strikes on U.S. embassies and other installations are likely to make what happened to the U.S. “Mission” in Benghazi on Sept. 11, 2012, look like a minor dust-up by comparison. One of us addressed this key consideration directly a week ago in an article titled “Possible Consequences of a U.S. Military Attack on Syria – Remembering the U.S. Marine Barracks Destruction in Beirut, 1983.”

For the Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

- ✓ *Thomas Drake, Senior Executive, NSA (former)*
- ✓ *Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)*
- ✓ *Matthew Hoh, former Capt., USMC, Iraq & Foreign Service Officer, Afghanistan*
- ✓ *Larry Johnson, CIA & State Department (ret.)*
- ✓ *W. Patrick Lang, Senior Executive and Defense Intelligence Officer, DIA (ret.)*
- ✓ *David MacMichael, National Intelligence Council (ret.)*
- ✓ *Ray McGovern, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA analyst (ret.)*
- ✓ *Elizabeth Murray, Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Middle East (ret.)*
- ✓ *Todd Pierce, US Army Judge Advocate General (ret.)*
- ✓ *Sam Provance, former Sgt., US Army, Iraq*
- ✓ *Coleen Rowley, Division Council & Special Agent, FBI (ret.)*
- ✓ *Ann Wright, Col., US Army (ret); Foreign Service Officer (ret.)*



New detectors for chemical, biological threats

Source: <http://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20130909-new-detectors-for-chemical-biological-threats>

In the late 1990s, Sandia scientists developed a simple-to-use handheld chemical detector for the military, the MicroChemLab. Ever since, Sandia has improved such microfluidics- and microelectromechanical (MEMS) systems-based instruments that identify chemicals based on gas chromatography, or GC, and resonator-style instruments such as surface acoustic wave (SAW) detectors. The lab's researchers are building on this sensor work to invent tiny detectors that can sniff out everything from explosives and biotoxins to smuggled humans.



[Sandia-developed microdetectors offer ease of deployment // Source: sandia.gov](#)

Sandia National Laboratories scientists are thinking small, building on decades of sensor work to invent tiny detectors that can sniff out everything from explosives and biotoxins to smuggled humans.

Their potential seems unlimited. The military needs to find low concentrations of chemicals, such as those used in roadside bombs or chemical warfare agents, before they hurt anyone, said researcher Ron Manginell. Soldiers often use detectors in less-than-ideal situations, looking for dangerous substances from among a rich miasma of diesel fumes, smoke and dust. They carry detectors into the field, where instruments must be portable, rugged, reliable and easy to use. In addition, inspectors at checkpoints and border crossings that see large numbers of containers lack automated ways to find trafficked people or contraband.

A Sandia Lab release reports that in the late 1990s, Sandia developed a simple-to-use

handheld chemical detector for the military, the MicroChemLab. Ever since, Sandia has improved such microfluidics- and microelectromechanical (MEMS) systems-based instruments that identify chemicals based on gas chromatography, or GC, and resonator-style instruments such as surface acoustic wave (SAW) detectors.

Detection world needs new instruments

Manginell said SAW-based instruments will continue to be extremely important. The world of detection, however, also needs new instruments that can find compounds such as carbon dioxide, chemical signals unique to humans or the volatile signatures of pathogens and diseases in livestock and humans.

Manginell led a project to develop such a detector and couple it with GC. Together, they identify vapors by "sniffing" volatile organic compounds (VOCs). The prototype of the new detector, a miniature pulsed-discharge ionization detector, or mini-PDID, is about 1 inch by 1 inch by 2 inches, can be coupled with commercially produced micro-GCs and can run for nine hours on a charge of helium.

Experiments have shown the mini-PDID can detect explosives-related compounds, pesticides and toxic industrial compounds. "These are nasty things," Manginell said. The detector also homes in on signatures of human odors and bacteria, light gases such as carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide and a broad range of organic compounds.

"We now have new detectors, like the PDID, with higher sensitivity and broader applicability that would integrate well with the SAW and micro-GCs to provide both sensitivity, the ability to detect a few molecules of a given compound, and selectivity, the ability to distinguish compounds from one another," Manginell said. A miniaturized vapor detection unit and subsidiary electronics could fit in a format no larger than a cell phone, he said.

Looking at a detector for human cargo

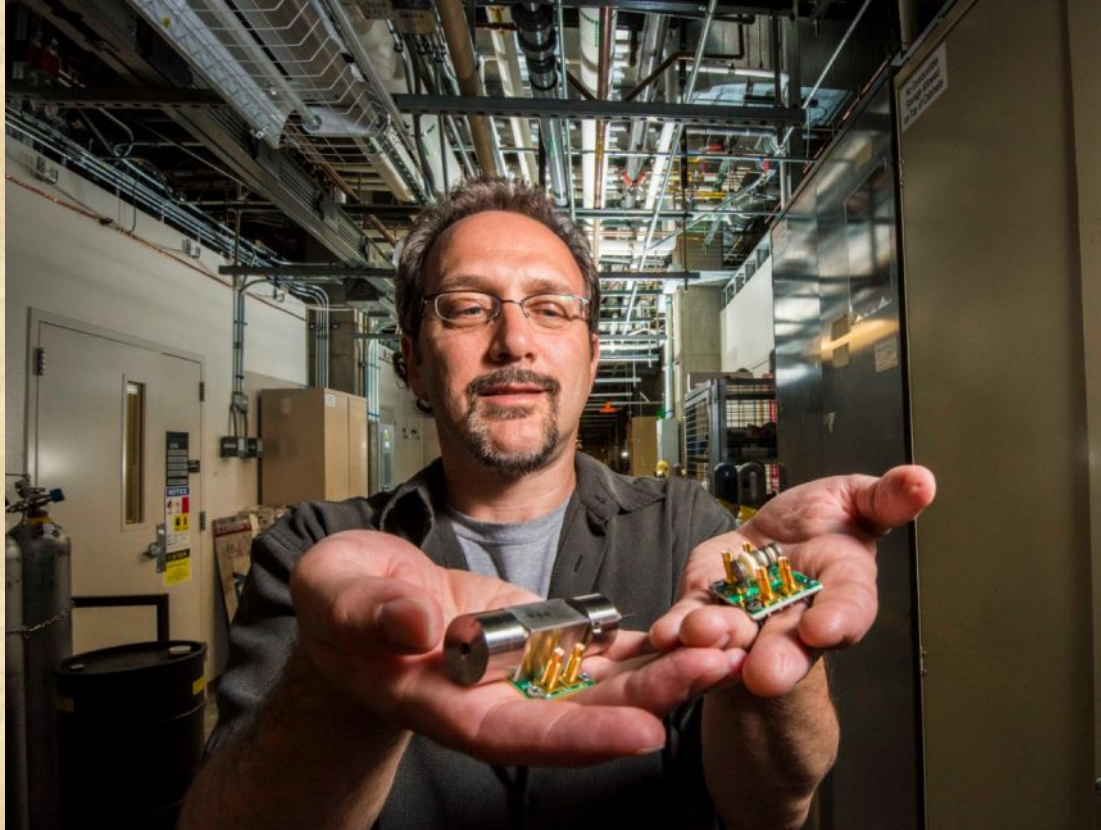
The mini-PDID's universal detection abilities are allowing researchers to look at vapor detection of bacteria, an approach aimed at bringing biological



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and chemical detection into a small, common platform, Manginell said. He highlighted the work, funded by Sandia's Laboratory Directed Research and Development program, in a presentation at last fall's International Breath Analysis meeting in Sonoma, Calif. The *Journal of Breath Research* published a paper by the team in July.

The project proved the miniature detector could find hexenoic acid at the parts-per-billion level. Sandia researchers wondered whether the technique could detect other bacteria, and tested it on the VOC signatures of *Microbacteria bovis* and *Microbacteria tuberculosis*. *M.bovis* causes TB in livestock and can cause TB in humans; *M.tuberculosis*



The team demonstrated the possibility of a VOC-based detector for humans as part of the project.

"People are brought across the border for many reasons, sometimes for a better life, sometimes for malevolent reasons" such as drug, weapons or explosives smuggling, Manginell said.

Current commercial detectors to find human cargo are about the size of a large shoebox, minus the electronics that operate them. Thus, Manginell's team saw promise for a miniature vapor-based detector for what he calls "indications of human presence."

In other words, sweat.

No other animal has one component of human sweat called hexenoic acid. The action of bacteria on sweat excreted by human glands results in that distinct eau de locker room smell – what is really a byproduct of bacterial metabolism, or a bacterial VOC.

causes human TB. The bacteria produce four unusual compounds not made by other bacteria that infect humans, and Manginell said the GC-PDID approach can detect those markers at concentrations comparable to or better than current techniques.

Sandia, in collaboration with the University of California, Davis, has submitted a proposal to the U.S. Department of Agriculture to use the approach on *E.coli* in soil and water to see whether it can differentiate between toxin-producing *E.coli* and more benign varieties.

Further development sought

The release notes that the proof of concept works for biological detection, and Sandia is seeking funds to develop software and mathematics for pattern recognition for specific targets, Manginell said. It will be several years before the technology could be ripe for tech transfer.



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Manginell said the technology also needs engineering innovations, such as a tiny low-volume, high-flow-rate valve that can operate under high pressure. In addition, researchers are looking for funds to further develop the mini-PDID and make it even smaller. Manginell wants to reduce the housing to the size of a AAA battery, and ultimately to MEMS size — typically devices measuring between twenty micrometers to a millimeter. For comparison, a human hair averages seventy microns in diameter.

In general, Sandia's chemical detection instruments work by collecting and concentrating a sample of air, separating the chemicals using a GC and finding the targeted ones through selective detection.

Manginell likens the GC to a racetrack for chemicals. Compounds in a mixture all enter the race at the same time, but various

compounds get to the finish line at different times, based on how they interact with the GC. The passage of time also helps indicate what a compound is since compounds separate at different rates, he said.

The micro-GC system can filter out common interfering agents such as water in the form of humidity, and detected compounds at sub-parts per billion concentrations in six seconds to two minutes in lab and field tests, Manginell said.

Sandia's micro-GC system approach is more compact and faster than commercial GC units and can be operated by non-experts, he said. It eliminates the need for a mass spectrometer, which detects chemicals by measuring the relative concentrations of atoms and molecules. Eliminating a mass spectrometer removes the need for vacuum pumps, which are too big and costly for broad field use.

— *Read more in Ronald P Manginell et al., “Diagnostic potential of the pulsed discharged helium ionization detector (PDHID) for pathogenic Mycobacterial volatile biomarkers,” Journal of Breath Research 7, no. 3 (18 July 2013)*

Syria's Chemical Weapons - The Terrorism Threat

International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) Report

September 8, 2013

Background

Since the uprising began in Syria in March 2011, more than 100,000 people have been killed, 2 million people have fled the country becoming refugees, and 4.25 million people are internally displaced.

The will of Assad's forces to fight is still there, but they are struggling to combat the Syrian rebel's gains until recently. It is believed that the al-Assad regime is desperate enough to use anything in its power to stay the ruling government, including use of any of its poisonous gases, as was the case this past March through May.

Besides the use of chemical warfare by the Syrian government there is a real and immediate threat that chemical weapons, agents or precursors could fall in the hands of terrorist organizations, be it Hezbollah (in which case the regime itself could be willing to provide them to its staunch ally), pro-Syrian Palestinian organizations, the Free Syrian Army and its local units or the various Islamist and jihadists factions like Jabha al-Nusra.

This report is the first part of an ICT project intended to evaluate the threat of proliferation of Syrian chemical weapons to local and regional terrorist organizations and beyond. The report includes information on the status of chemical weapons in Syria and their use updated to mid-June 2013 and an addendum presenting the main points of the United States and French intelligence communities' evaluation concerning the August 21, 2013 chemical attacks in the suburbs of Damascus.¹

The Syrian chemical arsenal

Source: <http://www.ict.org.il/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=8Pp51nXRrJl%3d&tabid=66>



U.S. still has 3,100 tons of chemical weapons to be destroyed

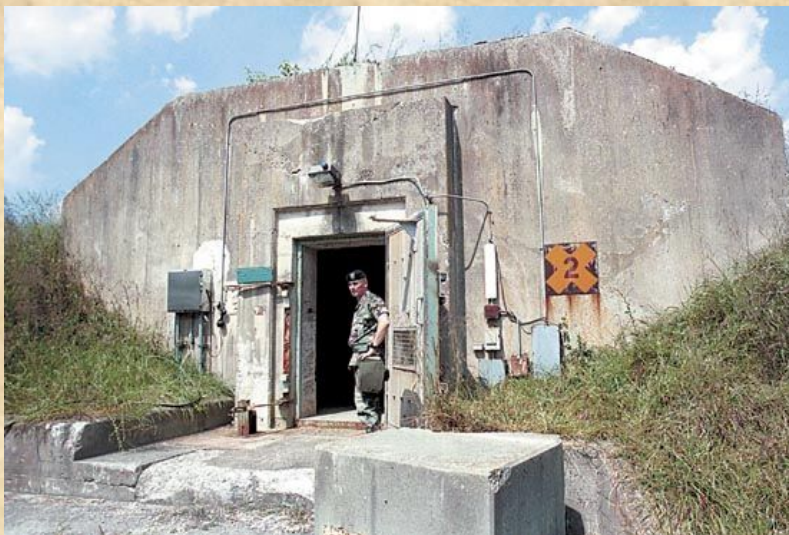
Source: <http://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20130917-u-s-still-has-3-100-tons-of-chemical-weapons-to-be-destroyed>

Last weekend's U.S.-Russia agreement on Syria's chemical weapons has put on hold a U.S. strike on Syria. The pause may allow a reflection on the fact that the United States possesses one of the world's largest chemical arsenals.



A cache of explosives is shown in 2008 after they were removed from mortars. (Anniston Star file photo by Bill Wilson)

Sixteen years after a treaty banning of chemical weapons went into effect, the United



States has 3,100 tons stored in Colorado and Kentucky. The *Anniston Star* reports that this is a mere 10 percent of the quantities of chemical weapons materials the United States had in its arsenals when the United States, in 1997, ratified the 1993 Chemical Weapons

Convention. Under the treaty, the United States and Russia agreed to destroy their chemical stockpile. The United States expect its remaining 10 percent to be eliminated by 2023. The growth of the U.S. chemical arsenal was the result of the U.S.-Russia relationship during the cold war. At the end of the cold war, Russia had about 40,000 tons of chemical weapons and the United States had about 30,000 tons. The U.S. chemical stockpile was viewed as a deterrent against Soviet use of chemical weapons on the battlefield.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Pentagon decided that U.S. nuclear weapons, in addition to deterring the use of nuclear weapons by the Soviet Union, would also serve as a deterrent against the use of chemical weapons. Instead of serving a military need, chemical weapons were now presenting a storage and safety problem.

"There was a long-running battle between the nuclear people and the chemical people, and the nuclear people won," Dan Goure, an analyst for the Lexington Institute, a Washington think tank devoted to defense policy, told the *Star*.

President Nixon ordered an end to chemical weapons production and renounced the use of chemical weapons. "The value of a thing as a deterrent evaporates when it's clear we would never use it," Henry Sokolski, who served as deputy secretary of defense for nonproliferation in the George H. W. Bush administration and now heads the nonprofit Nonproliferation Policy Education Center, told the *Star*.

President Reagan supported building a chemical VX weapon in binary form.



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Binary chemical warheads contain two chemicals that mix to become poison gas when the weapon is launched. The binary warhead was considered safer to store than pre-mixed chemical weapons. The United States, in 1993, signed the Chemical Weapons Convention, putting an end to the VX warhead and beginning the destruction of

above). Both locations will use chemical processes known as neutralization to destroy the weapons. Workers are currently being hired to destroy the weapons in the Pueblo Plant and the Blue Grass plant is currently being built. Both facilities are not directly under U.S. Army control. In 1997, Congress handed the destruction process to a federal agency called



chemical weapons.

There are 523 tons of VX and sarin are stored at Blue Grass Army Depot in Kentucky (photo: p16), and 2,611 tons of mustard gas are stored at Pueblo Chemical Depot in Colorado (photo

Assembled Chemicals Weapon Alternatives, established in response to public concern that incinerating the weapons would lead to environmental pollution.

Iraq did have weapons of mass destruction according to new witness

By Bob Siegel

Source: <http://communities.washingtontimes.com/neighborhood/forbidden-table-talk/2013/oct/1/iraq-did-have-weapons-mass-destruction-according-n/>

International columnist and college professor Amir George insists that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction really did exist. Speaking on The Bob Siegel Radio Show, George, who is promoting his book *Liberating Iraq*, offered some interesting insight into America's search for the WMD that prompted the Iraq war.

An Iraqi who now teaches at Chiba University in Chiba, Japan, George was in Iraq both before and after America's invasion. He was involved with early relief efforts after the war.

Since finding WMD's was the stated intention of the Bush administration's military campaign, Amir George's recent testimony helps re-open a news story that many thought had long since ridden off into the sunset. George's revelations are corroborated by other witnesses, long since put on record but mostly ignored or underplayed by the mainstream media.

The information in his book is drawn from meetings with the Iraqi prime minister, foreign

minister, top U.S. and international officials, and the Iraqi people themselves.

When asked how he obtained such connections, George said, "We were there before the war ... We brought the first relief truck of supplies right after the war. And as you can imagine, right after war, things are pretty much in flux. So it's basically whoever got there first kind of knew everybody and it developed from there."

George hopes to bring his message to many in the media. He was in the beginning stages of a book tour when he appeared on San Diego's KCBQ 1170, home of The Bob Siegel Radio Show.

San Diego is known as a "Navy town." It hosts a large naval base, and is home to many servicemen and women.

George's primary purpose in granting the interview to KCBQ was to help our country understand that many Iraqi people appreciate the American



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military, not only for their obvious liberation from an evil dictator, but also for a “spiritual renewal.” George credits this renewal to the kindness of the American soldiers.

But lightning seemed to strike in the middle of George’s interview when the subject of Iraq’s WMDs was raised. George freely and persuasively offered an account that contradicts conventional wisdom that America’s intelligence was mistaken or that “Bush lied.”

“Well, it’s fascinating to everybody, to be perfectly frank,” George said. “All I can say is that first of all, one of our distant relatives was actually a part of the situation right before the war and he directly says they flew part of them into Iran, they flew other parts of them into Syria and then other parts of them they buried in the desert. And, well, we detail in the book, we had a number of conversations and the conversations were always very strange, because nobody really can talk about it.”

When asked how the Bush administration could have failed to hear of these accounts and why they would not have vindicated themselves if they had known the truth, George said that very question was put directly to a U.S. soldier in Iraq who replied, “I can’t tell you, but what would you do if you were looking for something that was supposed to be somebody else’s and you found it and it turned out to be yours?”

In other words, at least some of those weapons had been supplied to Saddam Hussein by the United States during Iraq’s war with Iran.

“Essentially what happened,” George explained, “was there were all the weapons that, you know, we thought there were but they had been from a previous generation and most of them were ours as well as our allies ... So ... I think every one was stuck with this catch-22 situation ... Either you say that you couldn’t find them or you say we found them and they’re ours ... each of them being equally difficult ... and they chose as far as we can tell ... ‘we couldn’t find them.’”

George’s radio spot provides an interesting sequel to an earlier 2005 interview with Victor Mordecai, former Israeli Defense Force spokesman for the Judea and Samaria Command and former senior editor/translator for the government press office under Prime Minister Haskiy Shamir.

When asked if Iraq’s WMDs existed and found their way into other countries, Mordecai replied, “The answer is definitely ‘Yes.’ And by the way,

my wife ... Egyptian born and Arabic speaking, works in intelligence gathering. And they were watching the satellite monitors, of these tremendous 18 wheelers, crossing over from Iraq into Syria, prior to the recent war in Iraq, prior to the American invasion of Iraq. And the weapons were sent to Syria; the weapons were sent to Libya; the weapons were sent to Sudan.”

He went on to talk about “the gassing of the blacks in the south of Sudan from the weapons they received from Iran and Iraq.”

Suggesting that the Bush administration would, in all likelihood, have been privy to Israeli intelligence, Mordecai was asked the same question that was put to Amir George: Why would President Bush not vindicate himself?

Mordecai’s answer was brief and sobering. “Three letter word: O-I-L.”

Mordecai’s comments were not the only revelations from Israel.

An article in the 2005 Middle East Quarterly described an appearance on Israel’s Channel 2 on December 23, 2002, of former prime minister Ariel Sharon. The prime minister said, “Chemical and biological weapons which Saddam is endeavoring to conceal have been moved from Iraq to Syria.”

The Syrian government denied the claim. But Syria’s stellar reputation for truth telling did not discourage the New York Sun from investigating further.

In 2006, Moshe Yaalon, Israel’s top general during Operation Iraqi Freedom, told the Sun that Saddam “transferred the chemical agents from Iraq to Syria.”

A little more than a month later, the Sun obtained an additional interview, this time with an Iraqi general, Georges Sada, the second in command of Saddam Hussein’s air force. Sada went on record to say that weapons of mass destruction were hidden in commercial airplanes and smuggled into Syria prior to America’s arrival. This was made possible by the removal of passenger seats.

“There are weapons of mass destruction gone out from Iraq to Syria, and they must be found and returned to safe hands ... I am confident they were taken over.”

Sada claims to have obtained this information first hand from the pilots of the two airliners who approached him quietly and confided in him.



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"I know them very well. They are very good friends of mine. We trust each other. We are friends."

For safety reasons, Sada refrained from mentioning names.

According to these pilots, two Iraqi Airways Boeings carried "yellow barrels with skull and crossbones on each barrel." The pilots, he said, mentioned 56 flights and other weapons removed from the country in trucks.

"Saddam realized, this time, the Americans are coming," Sada continued. "They handed over the weapons of mass destruction to the Syrians."

When asked about Sada, Amir George confirmed his story.

"Those are exactly the facts. They were flown to Iran, they were shipped across the border to Syria, and then buried in the desert. So the situation in Syria that's developing in many ways is connected to this."

The variety of corroborating testimony warrants a second look into America's confusing rapport with Iraq so that our history books can be written properly.

Assuming these reports are true, it is anybody's guess why George Bush would not have chosen to disclose the information.

The fact that America once supported Iraq against Iran was not a secret. Did the timing

seem difficult? Would the discovery of our own weapons look embarrassing after we provided the world with such a compelling case to remove WMDs?

Was there an additional motive regarding our oil interests as suggested by Victor Mordecai?

Was America's need for oil so important and so delicate that our government chose to ignore the shipping of weapons from one country to another so as to not upset the balance of power in that delicate, unstable part of the world?

Did it seem easier and more diplomatic to act like our intelligence was wrong?

Whatever the reasons, nobody profits from a lie. In this case, hiding the source of Hussein's weapons spawned a much worse tale. Historical revisionists continue to suggest that George Bush invented a phony excuse to go to war. How sad if covering up one lie is the reason our former Commander-in-Chief was accused of telling a much worse lie.

This is especially ironic to people like Amir George who wrote his book for a more important reason than discussing WMDs. Quite simply, he wants America to know that Iraq is glad we liberated her from an evil tyrant.

This is Bob Siegel, making the obvious, obvious.

*The New York Sun and The Middle East Quarterly contributed to some of the news details of this article. The KCBQ radio interviews were conducted by Bob Siegel on **The Bob Siegel Show**.*

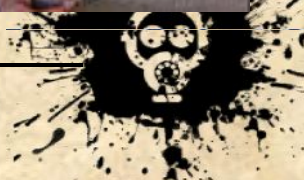
Bob Siegel is a radio talk show host and columnist. Information about his radio show can be found at bobsiegel.net.



11th & 12th February 2014
Mercure Hotel, Leicester, UK



Defending against the unthinkable



Syria: Behind the Media and Politics

By Yossef Bodansky

This report is a compilation and streamlining of a series of Defense & Foreign Affairs reports prepared on the Syrian conflict during September 2013, but with the insertion of considerable areas of new and important data, particularly on Iran and Turkey.

Political and media representations of the conflict in Syria have tended to reinforce entrenched positions, making truth the primary casualty of war. Senior Editor Yossef Bodansky goes back to primary sources and historical knowledge to get to an unvarnished perspective. But the final twist in the tail may be that the Turkish leadership may have a strong lever in controlling Syria's chemical weapons disarmament process.

September 24, 2013, saw the final nail driven into the coffin of the US and Western effort to influence, let alone control, the Syrian armed opposition.

Abdul-Aziz Salamah, the political leader of *Liwa al-Tawhid* in northern Syria, announced that 13 of the leading armed opposition organization inside Syria decided to unite their efforts under an Islamist-*jihadi* banner as the "Islamist Alliance". The Alliance claims to represent more than 75 percent the rebels fighting the Assad Administration. The Islamist Alliance was established in order to create *sharia* throughout Syria and to formally reject the Western-backed Syrian National Coalition (SNC) as their legitimate representative. Significantly, the group includes some of the largest ostensibly moderate Free Syrian Army (FSA) as well as *al-Qaida* affiliated organizations. Khalid Khoja, a senior SNC official in Turkey, estimated that the 13 groups had around 20,000 fighters and that "they effectively control northern Syria".

The supreme leadership of *al-Qaida* warmly endorsed the new alliance in a special communiqué. "A group of powerful *mujahedin* units rejected the authority of the pro-Western Syrian opposition leadership abroad and called for it to be reorganized under an Islamic framework," the *al-Qaida* communiqué read. "These forces call on all military and civilian forces to unite under a clear Islamic framework based on *sharia* law, which should be the sole source of legislation."

The immediate roots of this dramatic shift go back to mid-September 2013, when the leaders of the main *jihadi* organizations and other armed groups gave up on the potentially war-winning intervention by the US-led West and started to reconcile themselves with the irreversible loss of grassroots popular support and legitimization in the Syrian interior. Under such conditions, the *jihadi*s' stated goal of an Islamist *sharia* state against the wishes of both the vast majority of Syrians and the Assad Administration has now become the only viable objective for the armed opposition. This realization was a reaffirmation of the claim by neo-*salafi jihadi* leaders that there could be no genuine cooperation with, and support from, the US-led West irrespective of the routine political, intelligence and military cooperation with the sponsoring intelligence services including the "*Mukhabarat Amriki*": that is, US intelligence.

This stunning reversal was both inevitable and unexpected. The *jihadi* forces have dominated the armed struggle inside Syria since early 2012. The aid provided by the sponsoring states — Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia; all of whom have also been fronting for the US — enabled the *jihadi* forces to gradually dominate and/ or destroy the localized rebel forces recruited and run under the command of local chieftains from the local popular bases (tribes, villages, townships, etc.). By the Autumn of 2012, the remaining local militias had been driven into protecting their popular bases against the *jihadi*s and thus out of the anti-Assad fighting. By Spring 2013, the majority of localized militias were inclined to make deals with the Syrian security forces in order to jointly withstand, and where possible defeat, the ascent of the *jihadi* forces. A minority of the localized militias allowed themselves to be swallowed by the *jihadi* forces because they had become the sole source of weapons and other supplies in the destitute Syrian interior.

Meanwhile, since Spring 2012, officials of the "*Mukhabarat Amriki*" have closely supervised and effectively dominated on-site the distribution of military, logistical and financial aid to the Syrian armed opposition. Although the US never "formally owned" the massive weapon shipments from Libya, Pakistan, and Qatar, and subsequently also from the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia, operatives of the "*Mukhabarat*



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Amriki instructed their allies — the formal foreign sponsors of the Syrian opposition in Turkey and Jordan — in great detail and specificity who should get what weapons and other supplies, and when.

The sponsoring intelligence services, including the “*Mukhabarat Amriki*”, never had any illusion as to who was getting these weapons and what was being done with the US-endorsed and -supervised distribution of weapons and ammunition. Formally, particularly for the consumption of political Washington, these weapons went to the Supreme Military Council of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), led by Brig.-Gen. Salim Idriss, and through them to the FSA units and forces inside Syria. However, virtually all FSA-affiliated field commanders repeatedly complained that they did not get any weapons and supplies. Indeed, independent monitoring of the Turkey-origin convoys confirmed that the bulk of the weapons had always been delivered to *jihadist* forces. Furthermore, the *jihadists* intentionally received excess quantities which they used in order to lure and take over localized non-Islamist forces that were otherwise literally starving for food, supplies, and weaponry. In May 2013, a senior FSA commander reported that several FSA units with more than 3,000 FSA fighters joined the *Jabhat al-Nusra* in northern Syria alone.

The current unraveling started in mid- September 2013. According to *jihadist* sources, more than 1,000 FSA fighters swore the oath of allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham and the *Jabhat al-Nusra* Front in northern and eastern Syria, particularly in the province of ar-Raqqa. At the time, the *jihadists* already had between 7,500 and 10,000 fighters in the ar-Raqqa area. FSA sources conceded that the Raqqah Revolutionaries’ Brigade and the God’s Victory Brigade had pledged loyalty to the *jihadists*. The two brigades were part of the FSA as late as September 9, 2013. Thus, the last non- neo-*salafi* forces operating in the central Euphrates Valley — the bastion of the *jihadist* movement in both Syria and western Iraq — formally joined the *jihadist* cause.

On September 20, 2013, the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham in eastern Syria announced that five FSA *kitaeb* (“battalions”) with more than 3,000 fighters swore the oath of allegiance to the Islamic State. As well, the entire Brigade of *Nasr Salahuddin* of the FSA joined the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham in northern Syria.

Then, on September 24, 2013, Abdul-Aziz Salamah, the political leader of the *Liwa al-Tawhid*, read the “Communiqué No.1” of the “Islamist Alliance” comprised of the 13 armed opposition organizations.

“The *mujahedin* militant factions and forces that have signed this statement convened, consulted with each other, and concluded the following [four point agreement],” Salamah announced.

“These forces and factions call on all military and civilian organizations to unite under a clear Islamic framework, set forth by the magnanimity of Islam, operating on the basis that *sharia* is the arbiter of governance and making it the sole source of legislation,” Salamah read.

“This force believes that those deserving of representing it are those who have lived its burdens and shared in its sacrifices of honest sons,” Salamah’s statement reads. “This force feels that all groups formed abroad without returning to the country [and] without consulting those inside do not represent them, so the force will not recognize them.”

The members of the “Islamist Alliance” explicitly refuse to accept the Western-sponsored political leadership. “Therefore, the National Coalition and its supposed government under the presidency of Ahmad Tumah do not represent them and will not be recognized by them,” Salamah stated.

In conclusion, in the name of the “Islamist Alliance” Salamah urged “all militant and civilian organizations to unify their ranks and words, eschew division and discord, and put the interests of the *ummah* over that of any single group.”

Of the 13 armed opposition organizations signing “Communiqué No.1” of the “Islamist Alliance”, only 11 are known:

- *Jabhat al-Nusra* for the People of Sham (*al-Qaida*’s formal arm in Syria);
- The *Ahrar al-Sham* Islamic Movement (a 20,000-strong *jihadist* group that leads the Syrian Islamic Front);
- *Liwa al-Tawhid* (an FSA brigade in the Aleppo area under the support of Turkish Military Intelligence);
- *Liwa al-Islam* (Saudi-sponsored neo- *salafi* brigade that operates in Aleppo and Damascus in the ranks of the Syrian Islamic Liberation Front);



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- *Liwaa al-Suqour al-Sham* (a major FSA brigade that doubles as a member of the Syrian Islamic Liberation Front);
- The *al-Fajr* Islamic Movement (a large unit in the Syrian Islamic Front);
- The *al-Noor* Islamic Movement (a *jihadist* brigade that operates in Aleppo);
- The *Noor al-Din al-Zanki Kitaeb* (Saudi-backed *jihadist* battalions — or brigade — fighting in Aleppo);
- The *Fastaqim Kama Umirta* Group (local unit based in Aleppo);
- *Liwaa al-Ansar* (an FSA-affiliated predominantly *jihadist* brigade that fights in the Idlib and Aleppo regions); and
- The 19th Division (the largest and best organized FSA unit that fights in Aleppo as an ally of the *Liwaa al-Ansar*).

On September 25, 2013, *jihadist* officials rushed to further explain the earthquake. “The main goal [of the “Islamist Alliance”] is to unify the fighting forces,” explained Bashir Saleh of *Liwaa al-Tawhid*. He ridiculed the relevance and influence of the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) inside Syria. “The problem is that the Coalition is outside and it doesn’t know what is happening inside,” Saleh explained. “Maybe one or two or three of the Coalition members have come and entered Syria but then they leave quickly like they are foreign visitors.” Abu-Zaki of *Liwaa al-Suqour al-Sham* also stressed the irreconcilable disconnect between the exiled leaders and the fighting forces inside Syria as the cause for the “Islamist Alliance” formation. “We welcomed our brothers on the outside to partake in the revolution,” Abu-Zaki explained. “But when they didn’t represent us and the demands of the revolution, then we had to release the statement.”

The significance of the formation of the “Islamist Alliance” is not lost on the SNC leadership in Istanbul. SNC spokesman Louay al-Mokdad reported that Idriss had already called some of the rebelling leaders and commanders, “and they told us they signed this because they lost all hope in the international community”. But Idriss and al-Mokdad were quick to blame the perfidy of the US-led West for calamity that befell them. “We are really tired, Bashar al-Assad is killing us, all the West is betraying us, and they want to negotiate with the regime over our blood,” al-Mokdad quoted the commanders as telling Idriss.

Ultimately, the prominence of *Liwaa al-Tawhid* and *Liwaa al-Islam* in the formation of the “Islamist Alliance” is the key to comprehending the true importance of the earthquake. *Liwaa al-Tawhid* has long been effectively controlled by Turkish Military Intelligence. The brigade is the biggest Free Syrian Army unit in the Aleppo area. It is used repeatedly by the Turks for their own purpose, for example fighting the Kurds. Similarly, the *Liwaa al-Islam* is one of the largest *jihadist* group in the Damascus area and in all likelihood was responsible for the August 21, 2013, chemical attack. The brigade is dominated by Saudi Intelligence and has performed numerous missions on the behalf of Riyadh. Hence, the mere prominence of *Liwaa al-Tawhid* and *Liwaa al-Islam* indicate the abandonment of the US and Western political effort and the chimera of moderate armed opposition not only by the FSA and *jihadist* forces but, significantly, by their sponsors Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and most likely Qatar. These three sponsoring states will now be focusing on the overt sponsorship of *jihadist* forces and neo-*salafi jihadism* in Syria and the entire Mashriq.

On September 29, 2013, at around mid-day (local time), another group of 50 commanders of independent “battalions” and “brigades” in the Syrian interior announced their merger into, and pledged allegiance to, the new Islamic Army (*al-Jaysh al-Islami*). A printed communiqué was yet to emerge by month’s end, and the printed list of participants only identified 43 units by name. The insignia of the new organization has the *jihadist* black flag (the “*al-Qaida* Banner”) at the center and no Syrian symbol what-so-ever.

The still-unidentified leader of *Jaysh al-Islami* stated that the initiative was the result of the common realization of all fighters and commanders that Islam and democracy do not combine, and that only an Islamic *jihad* would defeat the Assad Government and save “Bilad as-Sham” (not Syria). The leader referred to the SNC with derision, calling them “the five star hotel revolutionaries”. He stressed that nothing was being waged in Syria but an Islamist *jihad* against “the Nusairis” (‘Alawites, Druze, and other non-Muslims), and that this *jihad* would ultimately spread throughout the Mashriq.

The political ascent of the *jihadist* groups in Syria and their pointed rejection of the Western-sponsored Syrian National Council (SNC) leadership in exile was a direct outcome of the Western handling of the chemical attack in Damascus. Relying on explicit assurances from SNC leaders in Turkey, the various rebel groups inside



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Syria expected the attack to quickly provoke a US-led Western military intervention leading to the toppling of the Assad Administration and the empowerment of an Islamist government in Damascus.

This dynamic reinforced the earlier conclusion that the August 21, 2013, chemical attack in Ghouta, eastern Damascus, was a *jihadist* self-inflicted provocation.

Behind the Ghouta Attack

The recent findings point increasingly toward the conclusion that the Ghouta chemical weapon use was indeed a self-inflicted attack by the Syrian opposition in order to provoke a US and Western military intervention against the Ba'athist Government of Pres. Bashar al-Assad. Ultimately, it was hoped that a detailed chemical analysis by the UN of the agents used would provide some indication as to identity of the guilty party.

The paucity of revealed facts highlighted how little was really known about the actual attack. There was, even by the end of September 2013, still no agreed upon number of fatalities, with unverified claims ranging from the US assertion of 1,429 fatalities to the French assertion that only 281 were killed. In other words, the French Intelligence number is about 20 percent that of the US assertion. Most Syrian opposition sources now put the number of fatalities at between 335 and 355, as does the non-governmental organization, Doctors Without Borders/*Méd-ecins Sans Frontières* (MSF). This is about 25 percent of the US number. Either way, this is too huge a gap not to be explained and substantiated.

As it transpired, the data provided by the eventual UN report raised more questions than answers. Close reading of the detailed annexes of the UN report raise doubts about the veracity of their findings given the repeated caveats pointing to likely tampering with the evidence, possibly (probably) intentionally so. The UN report acknowledged that the Mission had no freedom of movement. "A leader of the local opposition forces who was deemed prominent in the area to be visited by the Mission, was identified and requested to take 'custody' of the Mission. The point of contact within the opposition was used to ensure the security and movement of the Mission, to facilitate the access to the most critical cases/witnesses to be interviewed and sampled by the Mission and to control patients and crowd in order for the Mission to focus to its main activities."

Furthermore, the affected population of injured from whom samples and evidence were collected by the UN Mission might have been tainted in advance by the opposition fixers who organized them for the UN Mission. "A prominent local medical doctor [affiliated with the opposition] was identified. This medical doctor was used to help in preparing for the arrival of the Mission," the report explains. "Concerning the patients, a sufficient number was requested to be presented to the Mission, in order for the Mission to pick a subpopulation for interviews and sampling. Typically a list of screening questions was also circulated to the opposition contacts. This included the queries to help in identification of the most relevant cases." Simply put, the UN Mission could not verify independently the state and degree of contamination of the overall population. Nor could the Mission determine independently who were the injured individuals selected and brought to them by the opposition.

To-date, the US position in documents submitted to Congress has been that the victims died as a result of "nerve agent exposure". Orally, however, Secretary of State John Kerry claimed the US had "proof" it was sarin. The French intelligence report also attributes the deaths to "chemical agents" without further identification. The most explicit finding to-date comes from the UK's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory. Soil and cloth samples "tested positive for the nerve gas sarin". The sarin in the cloth was in liquid form which soaked into the cloth. As discussed below, this finding reinforces the conclusion that "kitchen sarin" was used. Hence, so much will depend on the UN's findings when their tests are completed.

The claim that the agent used was a "military sarin" is problematic because military sarin accumulates (like a gaseous crystal) around the victims' hair and loose threads in clothes. Since these molecules are detached and released anew by any movement, they would have thus killed or injured the first responders who touched the victims' bodies without protective clothes, gloves and masks. However, opposition videos show the first responders moving corpses around without any ill effects. This strongly indicates that the agent in question was the slow acting "kitchen sarin". Indeed, other descriptions of injuries treated by MSF — suffocation, foaming, vomiting, and diarrhoea — agree with the effects of diluted, late-action drops of liquified sarin. The overall descriptions of the injuries and fatalities treated by MSF closely resemble the injuries treated by the Tokyo



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emergency authorities back on March 20, 1995. The Tokyo subway attack was committed with liquefied “kitchen sarin”.

The knowhow for this type of sarin came from North Korean Intelligence, and is known to have been transferred, along with samples, to Osama bin Laden in 1998. That the *jihadist* movement has these technologies was confirmed in *jihadist* labs captured in both Turkey and Iraq, as well as from the wealth of data recovered from *al-Qaida* in Afghanistan in 2001-02.

Currently available evidence strongly suggests that the chemical agent used was improvised, kitchen-style sarin of the type known to be within the technical capabilities of the *jihadist* opposition. The Russian analysis of samples collected in eastern Damascus proved that the sarin used was “home made” — that is “kitchen sarin” — identical to the kind used in the Aleppo area by *jihadist* forces in March 2013, “only of higher concentration” than in the previous incidents. The UN report agreed with this finding in its analysis regarding the impact of the weather on the dissemination of the sarin, a dynamic, associated with heavy liquefied sarin, that is “kitchen sarin” and not military sarin which is dispersed by explosive power.

Meanwhile, the mangled projectiles shown by the opposition, and which were tested by the UN inspectors, are not standard weapons of the Syrian Armed Forces. These projectiles — 330mm rockets — have very distinct ribbed-ring fins which are similar to projectiles used by the opposition in Aleppo, Damascus, and other fronts, with both high-explosives and undefined materials. The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) retrieved a video claiming to be of the attack, but is most likely of a daylight testing of the launcher. The truck-mounted launcher included a chemical sleeve which was supposed to absorb leaks from the improvised warheads and not harm the launch crew; hardly the precaution taken with a military weapon.

Moreover, the warheads used in Damascus were cylindrical tanks which cracked and permitted a Tokyo-style mixture of liquids, rather than the pressurized mix and vaporization at the molecular level by the force of core explosion in a standard Soviet-style chemical warhead. Had Syrian militarily-trained experts built these warheads, they would have used the upper pipe for the core- charge the explosion of which would have created a significantly more lethal vaporized cloud of the toxic agent. The mere fact that the pipeline remained empty suggests the work of amateurs found in the ranks of the improvised weapon makers of the *jihadist* opposition.

As well, the opposition also pointed to cracked plastic pieces which resembled shreds from large blue plastic tanks/bottles (like big water-cooler bottles) fired by chemical launchers the opposition had bragged about in the past. These weapons are in agreement with the multitude of images of victims publicized by the opposition which did not show any injury due to shrapnel which would have come from Soviet-style chemical munitions of the type known to be in the Syrian military arsenal.

Most important, of course, is the question “Who could have done it?” given the available data. Significantly, evidence collected by numerous Arab sources on the ground in the greater Damascus area and recently smuggled out of Syria narrows the scope of potential perpetrators and the reason for the attack. This evidence points to specific commanders of *Liwa al-Islam* and *Jabhat al-Nusra* known to be cooperating in the eastern Damascus theater.

On the night of August 20-21, 2013, and the early morning of August 21, 2013 — a day before the chemical attack — the *jihadists’* Liberating the Capital Front, led by *Jabhat al-Nusra*, suffered a major defeat during Operation *Shield of the Capital*. Operation *Shield of the Capital* has been the largest military operation of the Syrian Army in the Damascus region since the beginning of the conflict. The *jihadists* also amassed a force of more than 25,000 fighters for their Front from 13 armed *kitaeb* [battalion-groupings].

The main units belonged to *Jabhat al-Nusra* and *Liwa al-Islam*. The other *kitaeb* were *Harun al-Rashid*, *Syouf al- Haqq*, *al-Mohajereen*, *al-Ansar*, *Abu Zhar al-Ghaffari*, *Issa Bin Mariam*, *Sultan Mo- hammad al-Fatih*, *Daraa al-Sham*, the Jobar Martyrs, and Glory of the Caliphate. They included both Syrian and foreign volunteers. (The mere gathering of so many *kitaeb* for the battle of eastern Damascus refutes the assertion in the US and French intelligence reports that the opposition was incapable of conducting coordinated large-scale operations and therefore the chemical attack must have been launched by Assad’s forces.)

Around dawn on August 21, 2013, the Liberating the Capital Front suffered a strategic defeat in the Jobar entrance area.

The Jobar entrance was the opposition’s last staging areas with access to the heart of Damascus; a place from where they could launch car-bombs and raids. The Jobar



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entrance is also the sole route for reinforcements and supplies coming from the Saudi-Jordanian-US intelligence base near Jordan's major airbase and military facilities in al-Mafraq (from where the eastern route to Damascus starts) and distributed via the Ghouta area to the outlying eastern suburbs of Damascus. The eastern route is so important that the efforts are supervised personally by Saudi Princes Bandar and Salman bin Sultan, and overseen by Col. Ahmad al-Naimeh, the commander of the opposition's Military Council of the Southern Region and Horan.

The *jihadists'* defeat on August 21 effectively sealed any hope of a future surge from Jordan by CIA-sponsored *jihadist* forces because the *jihadists* who, starting August 17-18, 2013, were attempting to use the western route to Damascus from the base in Ramtha, Jordan, had by now been encircled and defeated not far from the Golan border with Israel.

As the *jihadist* forces were collapsing, the Front commanders deployed an élite force to block at all cost the Syrian military's access to the Jobar entrance area. The majority of the *jihadists* in this force were from *Liwa al-Islam* and the rest from *Jabhat al-Nusra*. The commander of the force was a Saudi *jihadist* going by the *nom de guerre* Abu-Ayesha. (Abu-Ayesha was identified by a Ghouta resident called Abu Abdul-Moneim as the *jihadist* commander who had stored in a tunnel in Ghouta weapons some of which had "tube-like structure" and others looked like "huge gas bottles". Abdul-Moneim's son and 12 other fighters were killed inside the tunnel by a chemical leak from one of these weapons.)

According to military and strategic analyst Brig. Ali Maqsoud, the *Liwa al-Islam* forces arrayed in Jobar included "the so-called 'Chemical Weapons Front' led by Zahran Alloush [the supreme leader of *Liwa al-Islam*]. That group possesses primitive chemical weapons smuggled from *al-Qaida* in Iraq to Jobar, in the vicinity of Damascus."

When the *jihadist* Front collapsed, the *jihadist* leaders decided that only a chemical strike could both stop the advance of the Syrian army and provoke a US military strike that would deliver a strategic victory for the *jihadists*. The chemical agents were then loaded on what Russian intelligence defined as "rockets [which] were manufactured domestically to carry chemicals. They were launched from an area controlled by *Liwa al-Islam*."

Maqsoud is convinced the chemical weapons strike was launched at the behest of Washington and on Washington's orders. "In the end, we can say that this [post-strike US] escalatory rhetoric aims to achieve two things. The first is strengthening [the US] position as leader of the opposition and imposing conditions in preparation for the negotiating table. The second is changing the [power balance on the] ground and stopping the Syrian army's advance," Maqsoud told *al-Safir* of Lebanon.

The identification of *Liwa al-Islam* under Zahran Alloush as the *jihadist* force most likely to have conducted the chemical attack raises major questions regarding the Saudi involvement and particularly that of Intelligence Chief Prince Bandar bin Sultan. Zahran Alloush is the son of a Saudi-based religious scholar named *Sheikh* Abdullah Muhammad Alloush. During the 1980s, he worked for then Saudi Intelligence Chief Prince Turki al-Faisal in both Afghanistan and Yemen.

Zahran Alloush was involved with the neo-salafi/Wahhabi underground in Syria since the 1990s, was jailed by Syrian *Mukhabarat*, and released in mid-2011 as part of Bashar al-Assad's amnesty aimed to placate Riyadh. Zahran Alloush immediately received funds and weapons from Saudi intelligence which enabled him to establish and run *Liwa al-Islam* as a major *jihadist* force.

On July 18, 2012, *Liwa al-Islam* conducted the major bombing of the headquarters of Syria's national security council in Rawda Square, Damascus, assassinating, among others, Assaf Shawkat, Bashar's brother-in-law and nominally the deputy Minister of Defense, Dawoud Rajiha, the Defense Minister, and Hassan Turkmani, former Defense Minister who was military adviser to then-Vice-President Farouk al-Sharaa. In Spring 2013, Zahran Alloush helped the Saudis weaken the Qatari-sponsored *jihadist* forces in the Damascus area. In June 2013, he suddenly withdrew his forces in the middle of a major battle with the Syrian army, leaving the Qatari-sponsored First Brigade and *Liwa Jaish al-Muslimeen* to be defeated and mauled.

Significantly, in late August 2013, the opposition insisted on having Zahran Alloush and *Liwa al-Islam* secure and escort the international experts team when they collected evidence in the opposition-controlled parts of eastern Damascus. Zahran Alloush entrusted the task of actually controlling and monitoring the UN team to his close allied *katiba*, the *Liwa al-Baraa* from Zamalka. Thus, the international experts' team operated while in effective custody of those *ji-hadists* most likely responsible for the chemical attack.



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According to several *jihadi* commanders, “Zahrán Allóush receives his orders directly from the Saudi Intelligence Chief Prince Bandar bin Sultan” and *Liwaá al-Islám* is Saudi Arabia’s private army in Syria. A UN official told Sharmine Narwani and Radwan Mortada of the Beirut *Al-Akhbar* that “Saudi intelligence was behind the attacks and unfortunately nobody will dare say that.” The UN official explained that he had learned this from “rebels in Ghouta”.

The Bandar aspect is important to understanding strategic-political aspects of the chemical strike.

Presently, there is no independent evidence connecting Bandar, or any other Saudi official, to the supply and use of chemical weapons in Damascus. There exist, though, the long-time connections between the various *jihadi* commanders and both Saudi intelligence and Bandar himself. However, Bandar’s threats in the meeting with Russian Federation (RF) Pres. Vladimir Putin cast a shadow on the question of Riyadh’s foreknowledge, and, given the uniquely close relations between Bandar and CIA Chief John Brennan, Washington’s foreknowledge as well.

On August 2, 2013, Prince Bandar had an unprecedented meeting with Pres. Putin at the Kremlin.

Their meeting covered a host of issues ranging from future energy economy to the situation in Egypt to what to do about Syria. Throughout, Bandar made a huge mistake — believing that Putin was just like the successive US senior officials Bandar has dealt with in the past — namely, that like the Americans, Putin would also be easy to bribe with flattery, weapons acquisition, and oil-related cash.

Putin was not.

Of significance to the issue of the chemical strike in Damascus was the exchange between Bandar and Putin regarding the future of Bashar al-Assad. Bandar wanted Putin to support the toppling of the Assad Administration and its replacement with a Saudi-sponsored opposition administration. Bandar promised that Russia’s interests in Syria would be preserved by the proposed Saudi-sponsored post-Assad government.

In this context, Bandar sought to both allay Putin’s concerns regarding *jihadi* terrorism and to deliver a veiled threat. “As an example,” Bandar stated, “I can give you a guarantee to protect the Winter Olympics in the city of Sochi on the Black Sea next year. The Chechen groups that threaten the security of the games are controlled by us, and they will not move [also] in the direction of the Syrian territory without coordinating with us. These groups do not scare us. We use them in the face of the Syrian regime but they will have no role or influence in Syria’s political future.”

Putin responded quietly. “We know that you have supported the Chechen terrorist groups for a decade. And that support, which you have frankly talked about just now, is completely incompatible with the common objectives of fighting global terrorism that you mentioned.”

Toward the end of the meeting, Bandar again discussed the Syrian issue at length. He stressed that as far as Riyadh was concerned, there was no future for the Assad Administration. “The Syrian regime is finished as far as we and the majority of the Syrian people are concerned,” Bandar said, and they, the Syrian people, “will not allow President Bashar al-Assad to remain at the helm.”

Putin responded that Moscow’s “stance on Assad will never change. We believe that the Syrian regime is the best speaker on behalf of the Syrian people, and not those liver eaters.” Again, Bandar resorted to threats. He warned Putin that their dispute over the future of Syria led him, Bandar, to conclude that “there is no escape from the [US-led] military option, because it is the only currently available choice given that the political settlement ended in stalemate”. Bandar added that Riyadh saw no future for the negotiating process.

Bandar expected such a military intervention to soon commence.

Did he have any foreknowledge of a provocation to come? Significantly, Bandar insisted throughout his visit to Moscow that his initiative and message were coordinated with the highest authorities in Obama’s Washington. “I have spoken with the Americans before the visit, and they pledged to commit to any understandings that we may reach, especially if we agree on the approach to the Syrian issue,” Bandar assured Putin.

Did the Obama White House know in advance about the Saudi claim to controlling *jihadi* terrorism in both Russia and Syria? Did the Obama White House know about Bandar’s anticipation of an US-led military intervention?

Several Arab leaders, as well as senior intelligence and defense officials from the Arabian Peninsula are now convinced that the chemical strike was aimed to provoke



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a US-led military intervention which would in turn lead to the toppling of Bashar al-Assad and the empowerment of an Islamist government in Damascus.

These senior intelligence and defense officials have privately expressed anger that the US had not [yet] struck at Syria, as was so widely anticipated in the Arab world. These notables point out that in late Spring, the top leaders of the Syrian opposition and its regional sponsors impressed on the highest authorities in Washington and other Western capitals the gravity of the situation. The opposition and sponsors warned that unless there was a major military intervention during the Summer, the struggle for Syria would be lost come Autumn. The leaders of the opposition and their sponsors now insist that they were assured in these discussions that the US and key West European powers were eager to provide such help and intervene in order to topple the Assad Administration and empower the opposition in Damascus.

Given the political climate in the US and the West, the Arab leaders say that they were told, it was imperative for US and Western leaders to have a clear *casus belli* of an absolute humanitarian character. Recently (but before the chemical attack), the opposition and sponsors were asked for lists of targets to be hit by US- led Western bombing should there be a Western intervention. The opposition provided such target lists, convinced that their bombing was imminent. The leaders of the opposition and their sponsors now feel cheated, for there had just been an humanitarian catastrophe in Damascus with all the characteristics of the sought- after *casus belli*, and yet, there were no US and Western bombers in the skies over Damascus!

Significantly, most of these Arab leaders and officials are not in the know. They do o't pretend to have any specific knowledge of what happened in Damascus beyond the coverage in the Arab media. They complain so bitterly on the basis of their comprehension of how things should have been done given the overall strategic circumstances. And for them, such a self-inflicted carnage is the most obvious thing to do if that was what Washington and other Western capitals needed in order to have a viable *casus belli* for an intervention.

Meanwhile, through August and September 2013, the US case against the Assad Administration continued to crumble.

"No direct link to Pres. Bashar al-Assad or his inner-circle has been publicly demonstrated, and some US sources say intelligence experts are not sure whether the Syrian leader knew of the attack before it was launched or was only informed about it afterward," observed Reuters' Mark Hosenball.

A closer study of the much-touted electronic intercepts — which US Secretary of State Kerry cited as evidence — proves that Assad and his inner-circle were stunned by the news of the chemical attack. When the first reports of the chemical attack surfaced, a very senior Syrian military officer called in panic the artillery commander of the 155th Brigade of the 4th Armored Division of the Syrian Army which is under the direct command of Maher al-Assad.

The senior officer wanted to know if the brigade had fired any chemical munitions in contravention of the explicit orders of the top leadership not to do so. The artillery commander flatly denied firing any rocket, missile, or artillery. He added that he had already checked and confirmed that all his munitions were accounted for, and invited the general staff to send officers to verify on their own that all brigade's munitions were in safe storage. The senior officers took the commander to task and he was interrogated for three days as a thorough inventory of the munitions was carried out. This artillery officer was returned to duty as it was confirmed beyond doubt that no munitions were missing. (Since there was no other chemical-capable unit in the area, the claim of rogue officers should identify from where and how they had obtained chemical munitions.)

The reaction of the Assad inner-circle was in agreement with earlier observations by German Federal Intelligence Service, the *Bundesnachrichtendienst* (BND).

The BND reported that since the beginning of Spring 2013, Syrian brigade and division commanders had repeatedly asked the Presidency for permission to use chemical weapons against *jihadist* forces besieging them. The Presidency had always denied permission in strong and uncompromising terms. The BND has no indication, let alone proof, that this consistent policy changed on or before August 21, 2013.

This was also the opinion of a very senior Iranian official in Beirut. When the news of the chemical attack first broke, a very senior *HizbAllah* official called the Iranian for advice. The BND intercepted the call. The *HizbAllah* official wondered whether "Assad had lost his temper and committed a huge mistake by giving the order for the poison gas use". The Iranian senior official assured his *HizbAllah* counterpart that



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there was no change to Assad's "long-standing steadfast policy of not using these [chemical] weapons".

The strongest evidence extrapolated from the UN report against the Assad administration is the attempted calculation of trajectories. The Mission identified a single BM-14 140mm rocket (most likely a smoke-emitting munition) in Moadamiyah, and several 330mm rockets mainly in the Ghouta, Zamalka, and Ein Tarma areas. None of these weapons are known to be in the arsenal of the Syrian army. The calculations of trajectories by the UN and several US NGOs and media pointed out to various possible locations - all of them from the direction of, or in the vicinity of, known Syrian military units (the 104th Brigade of the 4th Armored Division on Mount Qasioun in north-west Damascus, the 155th Brigade of the 4th Armored Division in northern Damascus, and the Mezzeh Military Airport to the south-west of Damascus). All the suspected launch locations are at least five miles (8.0467 km) from the actual military facilities. While Syrian military units could, in the scenarios of the US NGOs and media, "shoot and scoot", so, too, could opposition forces in an attempt to implicate the Syrian military.

However, the main question alluded to by the UN report, was to what extent could the remnants of the rockets be relied upon to calculate possible trajectories. Regarding the Moadamiyah area, the report noted: "The sites have been well-traveled by other individuals both before and during the investigation. Fragments and other evidence have clearly been handled/moved prior to the arrival of the investigation team." The UN report noted that the same applied to the Ein Tarma and Zamalka area: "As with other sites, the locations have been well traveled by other individuals prior to the arrival of the Mission. During the time spent at these locations, individuals arrived carrying other suspected munitions indicating that such potential evidence is being moved and possibly manipulated." Indeed, the UN Mission attempted to calculate trajectories on the basis of two projectiles, while the NGOs relied on three and five projectiles for their calculations. Moreover, since nobody knows the range of the 330mm rocket, the suspected locations are essentially intersection on the map of suspected lines indicating the general direction from which the rockets were launched.

One of the main reasons for Washington's accusatory finger at the Syrian military was the assertion that the chemical attack took place in the context of a Syrian military effort to recapture this part of the Damascus area. Having met stiff resistance and under immense pressure to decide the battle swiftly, Washington's explanation goes, the Syrian military used chemical weapons in order to break the opposition.

However, the Syrian Armed Forces have a long history of training by the Soviet Armed Forces and access to Soviet-era weaponry, both chemical agents and means of dispersal. Among these are huge quantities of the vastly more lethal VX and grenade-size aerosols optimized for dense urban environments. The Syrian commando was supplied with, and trained on, these systems starting the late-1970s when preparing to fight the *jihadi*st insurrection then in some of Syria's main cities. Hence, had the Syrian military wanted to clear the said areas with the use of chemical weapons, they would have used VX in aerosols with greater efficiency and lethality. And why not use the same VX-filled aerosols in other key urban battle-fronts like Aleppo or Homs to expedite victory? Why use "kitchen sarin" and wide-area-effect munitions which would only hinder military advance into contaminated areas?

Hence, what is the basis for the Obama Administration's confidence that "Assad did it" to the point of threatening military action which in all likelihood would evolve into US involvement in Syria's bloody civil war? The most honest answer was provided on September 8, 2013, by White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough on CNN's State of the Union program. McDonough asserted it was "common sense" that the Syrian Government carried out the chemical attack, and provided no further evidence to back his statement. Nobody pressed McDonough on this point.

The US has long taken sides in the Syrian civil war and all the regional wars and strife integrated into it.

The US placed itself as the self-anointed manager and arbiter of the outcome of this fateful dynamic. Nobody in the region believes the Obama White House's assurances about a limited strike with no intent of "regime change". After all, this was the exact assurances given by the Obama Administration on the eve of the UNSC's vote on Libya solely in order to convince Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) to abstain and let the resolution pass (which they did). Now, should the US strike Syria, alone or at the head of a makeshift coalition, the US would have crossed the threshold of active participation and leadership. Pressure would mount on the US to complete the job: to



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invade and get involved directly in the fighting, to secure the strategic weapon arsenals (which would take 75,000 to 100,000 troops by the Pentagon's latest estimates), and to overthrow Assad and empower what Bandar calls "moderate" Islamists.

Arab leaders and their Islamist protégés are now convinced that only the US can, and should, defeat the Assad Administration and empower the Islamists for them. Should the US shirk or dither, there would be more and worse provocations, and more innocent Syrians would die in the hands of their brethren and saviors until the US delivered Damascus to the Islamists-*ihadists* and their sponsors.

After the catastrophe that post-Qadhafi Libya became, does Washington really want to try again in Syria? Wouldn't confronting reality and the Islamists-*ihadists* be a more expedient way of doing things?

After the US-Russia Accord, the US Courtship With Iran

On Friday, September 13, 2013, the United States and the Russian Federation signed an agreement aimed to bring to an end the political fiasco engendered by the US Barack Obama Administration in the aftermath of the August 21, 2013, chemical attack in Damascus.

The broad framework agreement avoided addressing the ostensible root cause for the sudden preoccupation with the Syrian chemical arsenal, and only set general guidelines for the eventual removal and/or destruction of Syria's chemical weapons (CW) by some time in mid-2014, provided the fratricidal violence and civil war would permit such undertaking. Significantly, the agreement applied to both the Assad Administration and the opposition.

In return for this agreement, the Obama Administration foreswore the use of force in Syria, thus ending any chance for a US-led international intervention in Syria. While Assad's Damascus promised to try and abide by the agreement even if the first reporting deadline is impractical, the Free Syrian Army's (FSA's) Brig.-Gen. Salim Idriss called the agreement "just a lie" and announced that the opposition would ignore it.

Simply put, the CW interlude only accelerated the emergence of an old-new greater Middle East from the ashes of the "Arab Spring". The crisis in and around Syria is thus returning to being dominated by the regional mega-trends.

See: Bodansky, Yossef: "Fragility of the Modern Middle Eastern State System Reflects a Return to Reliance on Traditional Societies", in *Defense & Foreign Affairs Special Analysis*, August 20, 2013.

The CW interlude has a lingering impact, but in the context of the US intrusion into the regional dynamics which the CW incident sought to amplify. Inside Syria, the legacy of the CW interlude is the acceleration and intensification of the existing trends.

This acceleration is made easy by the bursting of the opposition's expectations once the US military intervention failed to materialize. The morale devastation of the Syrian opposition — particularly the Turkey-based forces — is worse than anything the Syrian military has been capable of inflicting in more than two years of harsh war. It is probable that no amount of US-supplied weapons and funds could reverse the sense of despair and defeat.

Syria, in May 2013, entered the final phase of the war.

Both sides realized that barring a major Western military intervention in the Summer, Assad's Damascus would become the irreversibly dominant power in Syria and the war would subside by Autumn/Winter (except for *ihadist* terrorism which would continue indefinitely). The clairvoyant old *sheikhs* of rural Syria have made the trend more pronounced for they predicted that Winter would be longer and colder than usual. *Eid-al-Adha* — the Feast of the Sacrifice — is both the indicator of the well-being or destitution of the community (through the availability of lambs for slaughter and other quality foodstuff) and the start of the cold season. This year, *Eid-al-Adha* is in mid-October. This means that the destitute grassroots population would soon need even greater help in food, medicine, fuel and shelter, help which only Assad's Damascus is currently providing unconditionally.

In contrast, the Islamists-*ihadists* provide limited help only to the Sunni communities along the central Euphrates valley and on condition that they adopt Islamist ruling and governance. Hence, the slide of the population into the fold of the Assad Administration was accelerating, as anticipated.

Assad's Damascus is cognizant of this trend. Since the threat of a game-changing US-led intervention all but evaporated, the Syrian military has to face two major strategic threats:



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1. The lingering Islamist-*jihadi*st cells in the urban slums and rural townships of the economic engine of Syria: the populated zone around the Damascus-Aleppo road, and weapons stockpiles they recently received from Turkey; and

2. The possibility of a US-Jordanian-Saudi sponsored surge from the south to try and capture Damascus (tailored after the US-sponsored surge on Tripoli from Tunisia).

Hence, Syrian military activities in September 2013 focused on addressing these two challenges. The Syrian military launched a major offensive to the south of Damascus. The military enjoyed active support from local Sunni Bedouin and Druze militias, while the local *jihadi*st forces stayed away from the advancing forces. Hence, the Syrian forces could focus on national-level and trans-national *jihadi*st forces (that is, *Jabhat al-Nusra* and its affiliates) and on blocking roads leading from northern Jordan). Throughout the rest of western and northern Syria, the military launched a multitude of localized raids and sweeps; again, with growing support from, and even participation of, Sunni Arab local self-defense militias. These localized military operations aim to destroy national-level and trans-national *jihadi*st forces and the storage sites of the heavy weapons recently pushed into Syria from across the Turkish border.

Localized and nationalist rebel forces largely stay out of the fighting because of the sweeping despair in their ranks.

By late September 2013, the impact of the legacy of the CW interlude was palpable. Since early Summer, the opposition had great hopes and expectations that a US-led military intervention was imminent and would turn things around dramatically. The opposition was genuinely convinced that the defeat of early Summer would, by the magic of US and NATO bombing, transform into a strategic victory before Winter, and that the largesse and generosity of the affluent West would resolve all the endemic shortages so that Winter would not be horrendous.

The US needed an excuse to intervene, and the opposition provided it. But no intervention happened and, in the aftermath of US-Russia agreement, none will happen. Hence, the grassroots know miracles won't happen, and that Assad's patron, Russia, won't permit them to happen. Opposition commanders believe that there is no longer any point in holding on against the superior Syrian military now that it is clear that the US will not intervene militarily and turn around the otherwise lost war. Consequently, the slide into the fold of Assad's Damascus is accelerating and expanding if only because the alternative — accepting the Islamist-*jihadi*st reign during the harsh Winter — is unthinkable.

The slowing down of the war in Syria was, by late September 2013, already having a devastating effect on neighboring Iraq.

The main *jihadi*st forces in the area — particularly the *al-Qaida*-affiliated Islamic State of Iraq and Sham — are emerging from the Syrian chaos and can afford to allocate resources (fighters, funds, weapons and bombs) to fighting the Shi'ite Arabs for the dismemberment of Iraq. The *jihadi*st objective is to effect the *de facto* joining of Sunni western Iraq to the functioning *jihadi*st al-Jazira with its bastion in the central Euphrates valley.

Petrified about their ability to hold onto power in a region falling apart, Iraq's Shi'ites — both the security forces and militias — are escalating their own war against the Sunni Arabs. Moreover, adamant on securing on-land lines of communications to Syria, the Iranians are deploying their own Shi'ite proxies (loosely organized under the banner of the Iraqi *HizbAllah*) to also fight Iraq's Sunni Arabs. Hence the slew of car bombs by both sides and the overall fratricidal carnage should be expected to keep escalating in order to force Baghdad and Tehran into decisions they don't want to make about the long-term Sunni-Shi'ite balance of power.

The main unresolved issue hanging over the emerging greater Middle East is the rôle of Iran in lieu of the perplexing policy of the Obama White House. Presently, Pres. Obama was, by the beginning of September 2013, more desperate than ever before to attain a grand *rapprochement* with Iran and make a triumphant Nixon-style visit to Tehran. However, Mr Obama also seemed convinced that the only thing that matters to everybody all over the world are his words and *not* his actions.

Since July 2013, once Hassan Rouhani started his transition to the Iranian Presidency, Mr Obama reached out in order to revive the Jarrett-Velayati venue of direct negotiations. The Obama White House sent letters, messages and emissaries to several leaders in Tehran. In late August 2013, Mr Obama sent a personal letter to Rouhani. In it, Obama proposed to "turn a new page" in bilateral relations and promised loosening of the economic sanctions. US emissaries also made all the usual promises: to



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prevent Israel from striking Iran; to accept a *de facto* nuclear Iran; to permit Iranian hegemony over the Persian Gulf and the regional energy economy; to permit the spread of Iranian influence into Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia, etc.

Initially, Obama seemed to be following on his promises.

The semi-public pressure on Israel has been incessant, the disengagement from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States has been humiliating, the acceptance of Iranian domination over Iraq has been unconditional, and the protection of Egypt's Islamists genuine if futile. Finally, Mr Obama had the financial sanctions on Iran unilaterally undermined (ostensibly in support of humanitarian causes).

But Tehran's profound mistrust of Washington endures.

The sustenance of the on-land Shi'ite- dominated access to the shores of the Mediterranean is the greatest achievement of the *mullahs'* rule, apart from the mere survival of the Islamic Republic. In preparations for the anticipated intervention in Syria, Washington started assuring Tehran that the *Ikhwan*-dominated administration which Obama's Washington was planning to install in Damascus would not be anti-Iran and would guarantee all of Tehran's strategic and economic interests.

Mr Obama failed to realize, however, the depth of hatred and mistrust between the Persian Shi'ites and the Arab *Ikhwan*. (That Iranian Intelligence and the IRGC were sponsoring Sunni *jihadi* entities, including *Ikhwan*-affiliated, against the West or Israel does not mean Iran trusts them.) Tehran cannot fathom that Obama does not comprehend the essence of Shi'ite-*Ikhwan* relations, and therefore interprets the Obama White House's plans to empower Sunni Islamists in Damascus as a manifestation of Washington's hidden agenda against the *mullahs'* Tehran and Shi'ite Islam.

Even Obama's Washington could not ignore the adversarial impact that a US- led intervention in the Syrian war and the planned toppling of the Assad Administration would have on the nascent negotiations with Tehran. Realizing that a crisis which might affect the entire grand *rapprochement* was brewing, Obama dispatched his confidant, Jeffrey Feltman (the UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs and the former Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs under Hillary Clinton), and the Sultan of Oman to meet with Iranian Supreme Leader "*Ayatollah*" Ali Khamene'i just a day before the chemical attack in Damascus.

Both delivered Khamene'i and the Iranian upper-most leadership guarantees of Obama's enduring commitment to a grand *rapprochement* which would include the sustenance, and even increase, of Iran's influence in Syria and Lebanon, as well as the Persian Gulf. Tehran was non-committal and reluctant to accept any dependence on the goodwill of US-empowered Sunni Islamists in Damascus. Khamene'i warned Sultan Qabus that Tehran would reexamine the trust in the US sincerity on nuclear and all other pertinent issues should Iran's posture in Syria and Lebanon be undermined. (The timing of Feltman's and Qabus' trips to Khamene'i suggests that Mr Obama knew that a major provocation was coming. There is no indication whether Obama knew it would be a chemical strike.)

And then the Syrian CW crisis erupted.

While Tehran would hear nothing about compromise over access to the shores of the Mediterranean, Tehran grasped the extent of the desperation of Obama's Washington. If anything, Tehran's resolve to triumph only strengthened in the aftermath of the chemical strike. *Quds* Force commander Maj.-Gen. Qassem Soleimani briefed Iran's Assembly of Experts that Iran "will support Syria to the end". Iranian propaganda became virulent and threatened a regional war should the US strike Syria. Moreover, Iranian proxy militia groups in Iraq threatened that they would attack the oilfields of Saudi Arabia and cut off the "economic jugular" of the West if the US attacked Syria. At the same time, Iranian propaganda kept reiterating Tehran's desire for the resumption of nuclear and other negotiations, even though Rouhani vowed Iran would not abandon or compromise over its nuclear program.

Hence, the moment the threat of a US- led military intervention in Syria was removed, there began a more intense direct negotiations. Tehran is both relieved and emboldened by Obama's decision not launch strikes against Syria. Iran is determined to do its utmost to squeeze the best possible deal from the desperate Obama. In early September 2013, the Obama White House started boasting about "a possible thaw in long-frozen relations" with Iran. The Obama White House claimed to be "communicating with Tehran" and "moving behind the scenes toward direct talks" on reducing tensions, resolving outstanding problems and disputes, and normalizing relations.



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Obama hoped to revive direct negotiations and even potential face-to-face talks during Rouhani's visit to UN General Assembly in late September 2013. Ultimately, Tehran seems convinced that Pres. Obama would not dare to confront Assad's Damascus for fear of disrupting the fledgling US-Iranian bilateral negotiations, and Tehran intended to exploit this to the fullest.

Tehran's priorities are clear.

In mid-September 2013, Maj.-Gen. Soleimani addressed a closed forum in Tehran about the crucial importance to Iran of victory in Syria. He stressed that "Syria's pivotal rôle in defending the anti-US and anti-Israel resistance front [Iran, Iraq, Syria and the *HizbAllah*] in the region and its continued victories over the terrorists in the last one year are the cause of increased foreign pressures against Damascus."

He further elaborated that "the Syrian army's continued victories against the rebel and terrorist groups in recent months have angered the enemies and increased their threats and attacks against the country". It is therefore imperative for Tehran's own vital interests to secure the ultimate victory of Syria. "In the eyes of the West, Zionists and the reactionary regimes, Syria's real problem is not the ruling of the minority 'Alawites or the lack of democracy, but the reality is that the West and the reactionary regimes know that the resistance's powerful position in the region is indebted to the Syrian government," Soleimani stated.

Meanwhile, official Tehran considers the US-RF agreement the official removal of the threat of US-led Western intervention in Syria. "The new situation means in fact that any pretext for the United States and certain countries to engage in military action against Syria has been removed," Deputy Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian stated. With the threat of a US intervention effectively gone and with Obama focused on the grand *rapprochement*, Iran and its proxies can increase their support for the Syrian war effort.

The Jihadists' Revenge

The military and political dynamic in and around Syria continued to escalate since late in the week ending September 14, 2013, and more so in the days after that (September 15-16, 2013) with the Syrian military clearly having the initiative and the opposition forces either getting out of the war or venting their frustration and wrath on the civilian population.

Meanwhile, Tehran continued to dominate the political exploitation of the crisis. Not to be left out, Ankara initiated on September 16, 2013, a major escalation in the fighting along the Syrian-Turkish border.

The Syrian military intensified its offensive sweeps against predominantly *jihadist* strongholds in the northern and western parts of the country. This escalation evolved as ever larger segments of the nationalist and traditionalist opposition forces focused on the defense of their home communities rather than confronting the Syrian security forces. For their part, once contact is made with local leaders at the village and township levels, the Syrian Army avoids entering these communities and confronting their self-defense forces. On the contrary, the Syrian security forces are delivering both military and humanitarian aid to help the local self-defense forces withstand the *jihadists*. Consequently, the Syrian military can focus almost solely on *jihadist* enclaves: storm and clear them.

The most intense fighting was taking place in the Idlib area and the greater Aleppo area. In the north-west, the military focused on clearing *jihadist* strongholds, cells and networks in the al-Arbaeen mountain area and surrounding villages in the Idlib region. The military reported the destruction of several storage sites of weapons and ammunition. The most intense fighting was against *Jab- hat al-Nusra* units. However, the Syrian Army also destroyed bases and arsenals of the locally-based *jihadist* forces of the Dra'a al-Jabal Brigade, the *Squr al-Sham* Brigade, the *Ahrar al-Thawra* Brigade, the *Suyuf al-Haq* Brigade, the *Asar al-Sham* Brigade, the *al-Abbas* Brigade, the *Fursan al-Quds* Battalion, the *Ablin* Battalion, the *Omar al-Faruq* Battalion, and the *Maghawir Aryha* Battalion.

An interesting phenomenon reported by the Syrian security forces since the weekend of September 14-15, 2013, is that the food, supplies, and clothes of virtually all the *jihadist* fighters encountered in the northern and north-western parts of Syria were from Turkey. This meant that the opposition's fighting forces could no longer rely on local villages for food and basic supplies, and that the majority of the *jihadist* fighters encountered were recent infiltrators who had to bring everything with them.

In the greater Aleppo area, the Syrian security forces for the most part further expanded the secure zone surrounding the city and eliminated pockets of resistance



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inside the city. The scope and pace of these operations kept growing. Meanwhile, the *jihadists'* abuse of civilian population — mainly the more affluent Sunni Arab — intensified in the greater Aleppo area. The *jihadists* were committing crimes, murders, and overall abuse in the name of resisting the government encroachment. Significantly, there has been discernable upsurge in crimes and abuses in the areas where the influx of *jihadist* foreign fighters were most pronounced. The *jihadists* — both local and foreign — accuse the population of betraying them and their sacred cause. They then rob and pillage in the name of *jihad* and for the needs of *jihad*. Since late in the week ending September 14, 2013, and the few days following, several thousand people were evicted from houses and apartments and forced into exile, their entire property behind.

Meanwhile, the *jihadist* forces in the rural areas in northern and western Syria were increasingly focusing on taking their revenge against the civilian population who they are convinced has betrayed them and their cause. Thus, the abuse of the Christian-Aramaic city of Maaloula, and particularly the effort to force the population to convert to Islam under the threat of death, was a trend setter. The main objectives of the *jihadists'* wrath are the 'Alawites, Druze, Ismailis and all those defined as "Nusairis". The forces of *Jabhat al-Nusra* received a *fatwa* by a very senior Islamist jurist ordering them "to kill the Nusairis, the enemies of God".

Late in the week (ending June 14, 2013), *Jabhat al-Nusra* fighters entered 'Alawite villages in the Homs area and massacred civilians. The *jihadists* consider these atrocities to be more important than confronting the Syrian Army. "The people's wall of fear has been broken, as this was the first time these villages were entered and such a high number was killed," the *Jabhat al-Nusra* communiqué reads. These attacks were "in revenge for the killing in cold blood of Muslims and their women in Eastern Ghouta" by chemical weapons.

The Turkish Leadership Connection With the OPCW

Not to be ignored, Ankara was definitely, in mid-September 2013, making strenuous efforts to ignite the Turkish-Syrian border.

On September 16, 2013, during the afternoon (local time), fighting between the Syrian army and *jihadist* forces attempting to withdraw back from the Idlib area across the Turkish border into the Hatay province escalated.

The Syrian forces, backed and guided by one or two Mi-17 helicopters, were in hot pursuit after the *jihadists*. Several Turkish F-16s were scrambled from the Malatya air base to patrol over the area. According to the Turkish military, around 16:00 (local time), one Mi-17 strayed about 2 km across the Turkish border in the Yayladagi district of Hatay province. The Syrian military insists the Mi-17 was on the border line if it crossed the border at all, and if so then it was by a few meters only. Two F-16s immediately closed in and fired a few air-to-air missiles at the Mi-17 and shot it down.

According to the Turkish military, the helicopter exploded in mid-air. According to the Syrians, the Mi-17 made an emergency landing on the border line. (There are disputes whether it came down on the Turkish or Syrian side.) According to the Syrian military, two of the aircrew were seen emerging from the helicopter alive. The Turkish military insists the two jumped by parachute and landed safely on the ground. Both the Turkish and the Syrian military agree that the two aircrew were immediately surrounded and summarily killed by *jihadist* fighters. Meanwhile, the *jihadist* forces withdrew safely across the border into Turkish territory.

Meanwhile, in the early morning of September 16, 2013, the Turkish military committed the newly-formed *jihadist* brigade called *Katibat al-Taliban* to saving the *Jabhat al-Nusra* forces just across the border. In the days immediately after that, the *Jabhat al-Nusra* forces attempted once again to retake the town of Ras al-Ain on the Syrian border, just across from Turkey's Ceylanpinar district in Sanliurfa, from the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) forces holding it since July 2013.

Although Turkish artillery provided fire support to the *Jabhat al-Nusra* forces, they failed to push the PYD defenders. Fighting was heavy, and large numbers of *jihadist* casualties were transported in Turkish ambulances to hospitals in Urfa, Turkey. Hence, the *Katibat al-Taliban* was committed to battle in a desperate effort to save the *Jabhat al-Nusra* from defeat. The *Katibat al-Taliban* is comprised almost exclusively of Kurdish *jihadists*, including ex-PKK fighters who became Islamists in Turkish jails and were offered amnesty and \$1,000 if they joined the new unit. The *Katiba* is controlled by Turkish Military Intelligence and is commanded by Turkish *jihadists* (both Turks and Kurds).



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In the early afternoon (local time), the PYD forces defeated both the *Jabhat al-Nusra* and *Katibat al-Taliban* forces. The PYD launched a major counterattack from inside Ras al-Ain and pushed the *ihadists* toward the Turkish border. The PYD's thrust continued despite heavy fire from Turkish artillery just across the border. Hence, three F-16s were scrambled from Diyarbakir airbase. The F-16s were fully loaded with air-to-ground ordnance. According to the Turkish military, the F-16s were dispatched to conduct reconnaissance flights over the Turkish-Syrian border in order to ensure that "the intensified clashes between PYD militants and *Jabhat al-Nusra* fighters" did not "stray across our border". According to the Syrian-Kurdish leadership, the F-16s bombed the PYD's forces and positions in order to compel the PYD to not only stop the pushing back of the *Jabhat al-Nusra* and *Katibat al-Taliban* forces, but withdraw from the border area and the town of Ras al-Ain.

After the Turkish bombing, the PYD forces stopped their counterattack and withdrew back into their fortified positions inside Ras al-Ain. Fire ended by nightfall but both sides described the situation in the entire border area as very tense.

But the on-going Turkish escalation along the border with Syria might be even more purposeful.

The collection and destruction of the Syrian CW was legally designated to be accomplished by, or under the supervision of, the Organization for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Putting aside the question if the OPCW is capable of such undertaking, there emerged a major political quandary. The chairman of OPCW is Ahmet Üzümcü of Turkey, a close ally and confidant of both Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Even if there existed in the past a remote chance that Damascus, Tehran, or Moscow would trust Üzmüçü to be objective in dealing with the Syrian CW, the vitriolic anti-Syria and anti-Assad statements made by both Davutoglu and Erdogan in the aftermath of the border clashes obliterated any such possibility.

There should be no doubt that official Ankara was cognizant that the raising of the military tension along the border and the virulent political rhetoric would doom Üzmüçü's relations with Syria and Russia. Hence, Ankara is now in position to argue, on the basis of Üzmüçü's reports, that there is no chance Damascus would abide by the US-RF agreement and therefore the military intervention option should be reconsidered.

Meanwhile, the impact of the intensifying *ihadism*-sponsoring on Turkey is fast approaching the irreversible point. Writing in the September 23, 2013, edition of the *Milliyet*, Kadri Gürsel warned that Turkey had transformed into the Pakistan of the Middle East while Syria had become its Afghanistan. "Turkish territory in the border region that arches from Hatay to Gaziantep is on the way to becoming the 'Peshawar of the Middle East,' that is, a region where the state has no control over the border and outlawed forces move as they like," Gürsel said. "While we are Pakistanizing, our neighbor Syria — torn by a civil war — is in the grips of Lebanonization (ethnic and sectarian polarization), Somalization (collapse of public order and state) and Afghanistanization (dominance of *al-Qaida* and *ihadists*), with all those processes intertwined and mutually exacerbating each other."

Kadri Gürsel blamed the *ihad*-sponsorship policy of Ankara for the unfolding regional crisis. "Those capable of reading the map of the Syrian civil war would also discern this: If Turkey had not been Pakistanizing, Syria would not have been Afghanistanizing. It means that the *ihadists* — mainly the *al-Qaida*-linked *Jabhat al-Nusra* — could not have Afghanistanized Syria's northern region bordering Turkey without logistical support from quarters in Turkey and easy access to Turkish territory and the Syrian border," Gürsel observes. And just as the *ihadization* and radicalization of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area have evolved into the irreversible self-destruction of both countries and the ensuing destabilization of the entire South and Central Asia, so is the comparable transformation the Turkish-Syrian border region currently threatening to not only self-destroy both countries but set an entire volatile region aflame. The emergence of the "Islamist Alliance" is therefore just another inevitable step on the path to *ihadist* eruption.

Iran Cautiously Triumphant? But an Obama Political "Success"?

On the political front, Iran was setting the agenda for exploiting the ramification of the US-RF agreement both regionally and globally. The Iranian campaign intensified markedly on September 16, 2013, during a closed conference of top commanders of



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the *Pásdárán* (the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps: IRGC). Virtually all the key leaders of Iran addressed the conference.

Iran's President, Hassan Rouhani, set the tone. He stressed that the ongoing crisis in Syria is "merely part of a wider conspiracy plan" the West was pursuing all over the Middle East. "We are well aware that the disputes are not over one person or one president or the coming to power of a particular faction in Syria; it goes beyond that and it is obvious that the West has plans for the whole region," Rouhani explained. "What has happened in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Bahrain are rings of a single chain of events which aims to impact the region and weaken the Resistance Front."

Rouhani asserted that Iran was not seeking to control the region. "Our discourse is one of fighting terrorism in the whole region," he said. Regarding Syria, Rouhani emphasized, all of Iran's "efforts are directed at restoring peace and stability to Syria, and [Tehran] will accept whomever the Syrian citizens choose to run their country".

The next address was by the IRGC Commander in Chief Maj.-Gen. Mohammad-Ali Jafari. He declared that "the world powers suffered their latest defeat against the Resistance Front when their conspiracy to launch a military strike against Syria failed". However, Iran could not afford to rest of its laurels. "So far, the enemies' plot for military intervention in Syria has failed," Jafari warned, but that did not mean Iran's enemies would not attempt to avenge their defeat elsewhere. It was because of Iran's continued vigilance and military might, Jafari stated, "that almost all the schemes drawn up by the enemies against the Resistance Front have failed".

This development had profound ramifications for Iran's own vital interests and strategic posture. "Given the fact that enemies cannot overcome the Resistance Front in Syria, they definitely cannot take any action against the Islamic Republic of Iran," Jafari concluded.

Meanwhile, US Pres. Barack Obama was intensifying his campaign to meet Rouhani in New York during the late September 2013 UN General Assembly session, and there to reach a "grand *rapprochement*" virtually at any cost. However, Rouhani did not want to meet in person because Obama insisted on a brotherly-hug-and-kiss which Rouhani knew would not wash in Tehran. All the substance issues — the text of Obama's statement that effectively conceded *everything* to Iran — had already been agreed upon by Sec. Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. Desperate to start the *rapprochement*, Obama called Rouhani at the last minute and twisted Rouhani's hand on the phone. Obama reiterated his commitment to meeting all of Tehran demands, including far-reaching strategic compromises at the expense of Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf States. "Obama's phone call last week with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani could begin the process of normalizing diplomatic relations," Obama National Security Advisor Susan Rice claimed.

The greater Middle East will not be the same.

Yossef Bodansky is an Israeli-American political scientist who served as Director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare of the US House of Representatives from 1988 to 2004. He is also Director of Research of the International Strategic Studies Association and has been a visiting scholar at Johns Hopkins University's Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). In the 1980s, he served as a senior consultant for the Department of Defense and the Department of State. Bodansky is also a senior editor for the Defense and Foreign Affairs group of publications and a contributor to the International Military and Defense Encyclopedia and is on the Advisory Council of the Intelligence Summit. Bodansky's numerous articles have been published in Global Affairs, Jane's Defense Weekly, Defense and Foreign Affairs: Strategic Policy and other periodicals

The chemical weapons trail: Inside the mission to destroy Syria's arsenal

Source: <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2013/1006/The-chemical-weapons-trail-Inside-the-mission-to-destroy-Syria-s-arsenal-video>

For more than 15 years, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has quietly and methodically destroyed

hundreds of tons of unwanted chemical munitions left over from the



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cold war or surrendered by states seeking international goodwill.

But now the little-known Netherlands-based organization is in the glare of international publicity as it takes the lead in an unprecedented crash program to destroy Syria's chemical weapons arsenal in the middle of a civil war and on an ambitious nine-month deadline.

"It's the ultimate example of building a plane

chemical weapons arsenal, the tight time frame, and the dangers of operating amid a bitter civil war that has left 110,000 people dead.

A year ago, details of Syria's long-suspected chemical weapons program were shrouded in mystery. But in the past 12 months the Syrian opposition and human rights groups have lodged numerous accusations against the regime of Bashar al-Assad of using chemical



and flying it at the same time," says Michael Luhan, OPCW's spokesman. "But ... the plane has lifted off, and we've got our game plan set for rotating in and out of Syria in the next month."

But now the little-known Netherlands-based organization is in the glare of international publicity as it takes the lead in an unprecedented crash program to destroy Syria's chemical weapons arsenal in the middle of a civil war and on an ambitious nine-month deadline.

"It's the ultimate example of building a plane and flying it at the same time," says Michael Luhan, OPCW's spokesman. "But ... the plane has lifted off, and we've got our game plan set for rotating in and out of Syria in the next month."

Dozens of weapons inspectors have arrived in Damascus, Syria, for the opening phase of the verification process. They face a daunting challenge, given the suspected scale of Syria's

weapons against his domestic enemies, and information has begun to seep out.

The Aug. 21 sarin gas attack against rebel-held areas of Damascus – the deadliest poison gas attack globally in 25 years, with a death toll of more than 1,000 people – set in motion a fast-moving chain of events. Blaming the Assad regime for the attack, the United States attempted to rally support for a campaign of airstrikes against the Syrian military. The attack, which seemed imminent, was put off only after the US and Russia reached a deal in which Syria would give up its chemical weapons arsenal for destruction.

On Sept. 14 Syria formally applied for membership in the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), an international arms control agreement, and five days later it handed over an initial, relatively comprehensive inventory of its chemical arsenal.



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"The US told us that on a [scale of A to E] this inventory would be B+," Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, told Russia's Channel One television.

Clinching the process, last week the OPCW issued a decree and the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution detailing the procedures to achieve the total eradication of Syria's chemical arsenal and production

establish channels with Syrian authorities and do preliminary surveillance of weapons sites.

The inspectors have until Oct. 27 to check all chemical weapons program facilities, meaning they will have to visit more than two sites a day if they wish to meet the OPCW's deadline. Furthermore, all four chemical production sites must be destroyed by Nov. 1.

Funding for the weapons eradication effort is



facilities by July 1, 2014.

Syria had until Oct. 4 to hand over an inventory of its entire arsenal, including information on military code names, delivery munitions, and locations of facilities for production, mixing, research and development, and storage.

Syria is estimated to have about 1,000 tons of chemical agents, including mustard gas, a blistering agent, and the nerve agents sarin and VX. It has an estimated four production facilities – one near Homs, another on the northern coast near Latakia, one just south of Hama, and the largest, the As-Safira facility, southeast of Aleppo. (See map on opposite page.) The number of storage facilities containing chemical agents and munitions is estimated at 45.

Monumental task

The OPCW inspectors are on a tight time frame. The verification process began Oct. 1, when a 20-person team arrived in Damascus to

not expected to be a problem, even though the UN refugee agency and the International Committee of the Red Cross have struggled to round up adequate funding for more than 2 million Syrian refugees.

"The offers of voluntary contributions from states are coming in thick and fast," Mr. Luhan says. "We expect there will be pretty robust support for this kind of mission." Even at "peak surge strength," there are likely to be fewer than 100 inspectors, he says.

Charles Duelfer, a former top official with the UN Special Commission on Iraq, set up after the 1991 Gulf War to monitor and eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, estimated that some 75 people would be required for a mission of this scale and duration. Fifteen people would handle transport and communications, leaving four teams of 15 each to conduct the inspections on the ground, he says.

The teams will catalog munitions and chemical agents and check them off



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against the inventory supplied by the Syrian authorities.

"The important thing is to determine contents of a facility, assess the possibility for diversion – and take steps to minimize this risk – and document destruction operations," says John Hart, the head of the Chemical and Biological Security Project at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Chemical agent containers, precursor materials, and munitions filled with poison gas will be tagged and photographed, and surveillance cameras could be installed to provide additional security. Once the site has been surveyed, it could be sealed pending a decision on how to destroy the chemical weapons.

It promises to be a laborious process.

"It's a lot to do, and it's a lot of detailed work and accounting, but it is doable," Mr. Duelfer says.

The trust issue

Syrian authorities have assured the UN and the OPCW that they will fully comply, but there is concern Syria may seek to hide some of its arsenal.

The OPCW's task is to catalog and destroy chemical weapons turned over by a signatory to the CWC; it does not have the latitude to conduct additional investigations if it suspects the host nation has not disclosed its full arsenal.

"Past state behavior and simple logic would suggest that the Assad regime will try to keep some of its chemical warfare agents. Thus, the inspectors will likely encounter, whether they are aware of it or not, significant subterfuge," says Charles Blair, a chemical weapons expert and instructor at George Mason and Johns Hopkins Universities formerly with the Federation of American Scientists.

But Russia, a key ally of the Assad regime, has invested its "credibility and prestige" in the process, which places pressure on the Assad regime to cooperate, Duelfer says. "I can only imagine that Lavrov [the Russian foreign minister] made the case and said 'listen guys, your only hope of surviving is to have your international prestige grow while the international prestige of the opposition is decaying' and that can be a pretty important incentive for Bashar al-Assad," he says.

UN Resolution 2118 grants the Security Council the option of taking action under the

enforceable Chapter 7 of the UN charter if Syria is deemed to be hindering the process.

Safety in a danger zone

Inspectors' safety will be a chief concern as they catalog 1,000 tons of chemical agents and their delivery systems in less than a month.

"Nothing has been done like this in the middle of a fierce civil war.... So security is the No. 1 issue without a shadow of a doubt," says Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, a former commanding officer at Britain's Joint Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Regiment and current chief operating officer of Securebio, a chemical weapons consultancy.

Most of Syria's chemical weapon storage sites are believed to be in areas under the regime's control. But because of the fluid nature of the war, some facilities could fall into contested zones or be overrun by rebel forces.

As the host nation, Syria is responsible for providing security to inspection teams in regime-held areas. If the inspectors need to visit sites under opposition control, the local rebel forces are required to help. But the opposition is unhappy with the eradication program, arguing that it spared the regime a punishing attack by the US and granted it undeserved legitimacy.

"The opposition groups are not terribly keen on the current action and would prefer to have some kinetic involvement from the US and others," says Mr. Bretton-Gordon. "If they decide to create problems for the investigation teams ... then it's going to make an already challenging task even more difficult."

The challenges of destruction

Once the arsenal has been logged and secured, the OPCW will have to decide on the best means of destroying the weapons. In the past, chemical weapons were often simply tossed into the sea. In 1947, Britain and the Soviet Union disposed of an estimated 65,000 tons of German chemical weapons by dumping them into the Baltic Sea, where today the corroding containers pose a health risk to surrounding nations.

The adoption of the CWC in 1997 effectively ended such haphazard practices. Today, the favored destruction methods are incineration, hydrolyzation, and detonation with explosives.

Incineration requires the chemical agent to be drained from the weapon,



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such as a rocket or artillery shell, and incinerated at temperatures around 2,000 degrees F. Any explosive elements in the shell or missile, as well as the contaminated metal components, are burned in separate furnaces. The released gases are scrubbed with both wet and dry filters before the end product is released into the atmosphere.

Hydrolyzation involves the addition of hot water and caustic agents such as sodium hydroxide, which destroy the toxicity of the chemical agent. The neutralized agent can be burned in an incinerator or treated, similar to sewage water.

In explosive destruction, the chemical-bearing munitions are placed in a reactor and detonated or neutralized with chemical treatment.

"Japan has used this method to clean up its World War II-era conventional and chemical weapons that were left in China," Mr. Blair says.

The bulk of Syria's nerve agents is reportedly unweaponized liquid precursors, which can be treated as normal hazardous industrial products, making any transportation and destruction easier, experts say.

The OPCW can use mobile chemical destruction systems or centralize the stockpile in a safe location in Syria, where it will be destroyed. Several experts say the most practical solution is to transfer the weapons outside Syria, possibly via the Port of Tartus,

where Russia has a naval base, for destruction in other countries.

"I think the favored option is to route them out of Syria ... to Russian or US facilities," says Bretton-Gordon. "In that fashion they could be removed from Syria by the middle of next year as decreed by the UN Security Council."

However, the CWC forbids the "transfer, directly or indirectly," of chemical weapons to third parties and also prohibits signatory states from receiving them.

"There is no way they can get around it," says Jean Pascal Zanders, a weapons of mass destruction disarmament expert and consultant who blogs at the-trench.org. "Both parts of the transaction, the send and the receiving, are quite explicitly banned."

The limited capacity of mobile systems may not make the July 1, 2014, deadline feasible, especially given that Syria is at war. But transporting the chemical munitions to a centralized location increases the risk of diversion or seizure by armed groups.

Despite the obstacles, the fact that the fate of Syria's chemical weapons stockpile has brought the US and Russia into rare agreement has raised hopes of a possible breakthrough in the conflict.

"People have started talking to each other, and there is a glimmer of hope for perhaps having a [peace negotiation] meeting in November with a view of ending the conflict," Mr. Zanders says. "In that sense it is encouraging in ... seeing a possible end to the war."

British jihadist suspects of making chemical weapons for al-Shabaab

Source: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/british-jihadist-suspects-of-making-chemical-weapons-for-al-shabaab/story-fnb64oi6-1226733422055#>

A British jihadist is suspected of developing chemical weapons for the terrorists behind the Kenyan shopping centre massacre, raising fears that al-Qaeda will use them on Western targets.

Madhi Hashi, 24, is accused of being a leading figure in al-Shabaab, the African affiliate of al-Qaeda. He was captured while preparing to fly to Yemen to discuss the group's campaign.

Western intelligence services fear a terrorist organisation acquiring chemical or biological weapons because of the potential for mass casualties. Al-Qaeda tested mustard gas in Afghanistan. Yemen, now regarded as the

most active location for al-Qaeda's global ambitions, is seen as the most likely location for further experiments.

Mr Hashi, a former community worker from Camden, North London, awaits trial in New York for alleged terrorism offences connected to al-Shabaab between December 2008 and August 2012. He is accused of being a member of "an elite al-Shabaab suicide bombing unit" and of having "specific knowledge regarding significant al-Qaeda members operating in East Africa who sought to carry out attacks against US and Western interests".



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Mr Hashi and two Swedish men are also said to have "substantial knowledge regarding an al-Shabaab research and development department that was developing chemical

deported from Cairo after being arrested by national security police who accused him of having links to al-Qaeda. In May 2008 he was interviewed again at



weapons".

The men have not been charged in relation to chemical weapons but the allegation of their knowledge of the covert programme will form part of the case against them.

It will also aid the US Government's argument that al-Shabaab poses a real threat to Western interests.

US sources said the Nairobi attack last month was an example of foreign militants, including several Americans and possibly a Briton, launching an operation planned in Somalia that had far-reaching consequences.

US authorities said the men planned to offer their services to Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula after becoming disillusioned with al-Shabaab, because they wanted to spread the terror beyond the borders of Somalia.

The seriousness of the charges and the intelligence about their alleged connection to the development of chemical weapons explained why three men crossing East Africa had been arrested and taken to the US for trial, an intelligence source said.

British authorities have known about Mr Hashi for some years. He was interviewed by police at Heathrow in August 2006, having been

Heathrow on his return from Damascus, where he claimed to have been studying Arabic. He began working with the Kentish Town Community Organisation and enrolled on an engineering course at Haringey College. He travelled to Somalia in April 2009, but was deported from Djibouti after being identified as a terrorist risk.

He claims that he was harassed in Britain by MI5 and that the security service targeted Somalis in North London. He returned to Somalia later in 2009.

Mr Hashi was born in Mogadishu and came to Britain in 1995, obtaining citizenship in 2004. Last summer his family was told that Theresa May, the Home Secretary, had revoked his citizenship because he was "involved in Islamist extremism and presented a risk to national security".

Amaud Mafille, of CagePrisoners, an organisation that has been supporting Mr Hashi's family, said: "It is surprising that this [prosecution document about the chemical weapons development] has surfaced 10 months after Madhi's appearance in the US penal system. These allegations obscure the more serious



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questions surrounding the stripping of Mr Hashi's British citizenship, his kidnapping, torture, secret rendition, reappearance and

continued detention in inhumane conditions inside a US prison."

New respiratory mask developed for U.S. Army personnel

Source: http://www.bioprepwatch.com/medical_countermeasures/new-respiratory-mask-developed-for-u-s-army-personnel/333080/#

U.S. Army personnel recently began utilizing Edgewood Chemical Biological Center Engineering's joint service general purpose mask, a respiratory filtration system that can protect soldiers against radioactive particles as well as biological and chemical agents.



JSGPM was designed over a 15-years period with the goal of providing an all-purpose mask that could be used for all branches of the military and for all purposes. Previous iterations of protective masks were designed for specific uses required by the different military branches.

"The new mask provides the (soldier) with improvements in nearly every single category over the older generations of masks: comfort, visibility, hydration, you name it," Project Manager for ECBC Engineering Bill Fritch said.

The company distributed more than 800,000 masks to members of the Marine Corps, Air Force, Navy and Army.

JSGPM is designed with a low profile that allows for the operation of weapons or equipment while it's worn. The mask also features an ergonomic design that increases visibility and reduces the need for maintenance.

"There are no formal plans to develop a new mask right now," Fritch said. "I expect this system to be out there for a long time."

Lawmakers, DHS Weigh How to Secure Ports Most Vulnerable to WMDs

Source: <http://www.nextgov.com/defense/2013/10/lawmakers-dhs-weigh-how-secure-ports-most-vulnerable-wmds/72188/?oref=ng-HPriver>

Lawmakers are working with the Homeland Security Department to determine whether it is feasible to establish a U.S. presence at the foreign ports it considers most vulnerable to the smuggling of illicit weapons of mass destruction.

According to a report the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office released last month, the DHS Container Security Initiative does not have a presence "at about half" of the ports U.S. Customs and Border Protection considers "high risk." Meanwhile, "about one fifth" of the ports where the container program does have a presence are considered "lower risk locations," the report says.

This does not mean that high-risk containers are not inspected before they are unloaded at U.S. ports, according to an aide to the Senate Homeland Security Committee, which requested the report. DHS officials track such containers electronically and order inspections upon arrival, said the Senate staffer, who was

not authorized to discuss the issue and asked to not be named.

Still, it would be preferable to establish a U.S. presence at the higher-risk ports so that more of the riskier containers could be checked before setting sail, according to the aide.

"A dirty bomb going off in the port of Long Beach is better than it going off in downtown Los Angeles but it's still pretty bad," the staffer said. "If we can find it [at a foreign port] we're much better off."

Shifting program resources from one port to another is not necessarily easy, however, the GAO report says. Negotiations are not always successful with potential host countries where higher-risk ports are located. In addition, removing DHS personnel from lower-risk ports could negatively impact U.S. relations with current host countries.

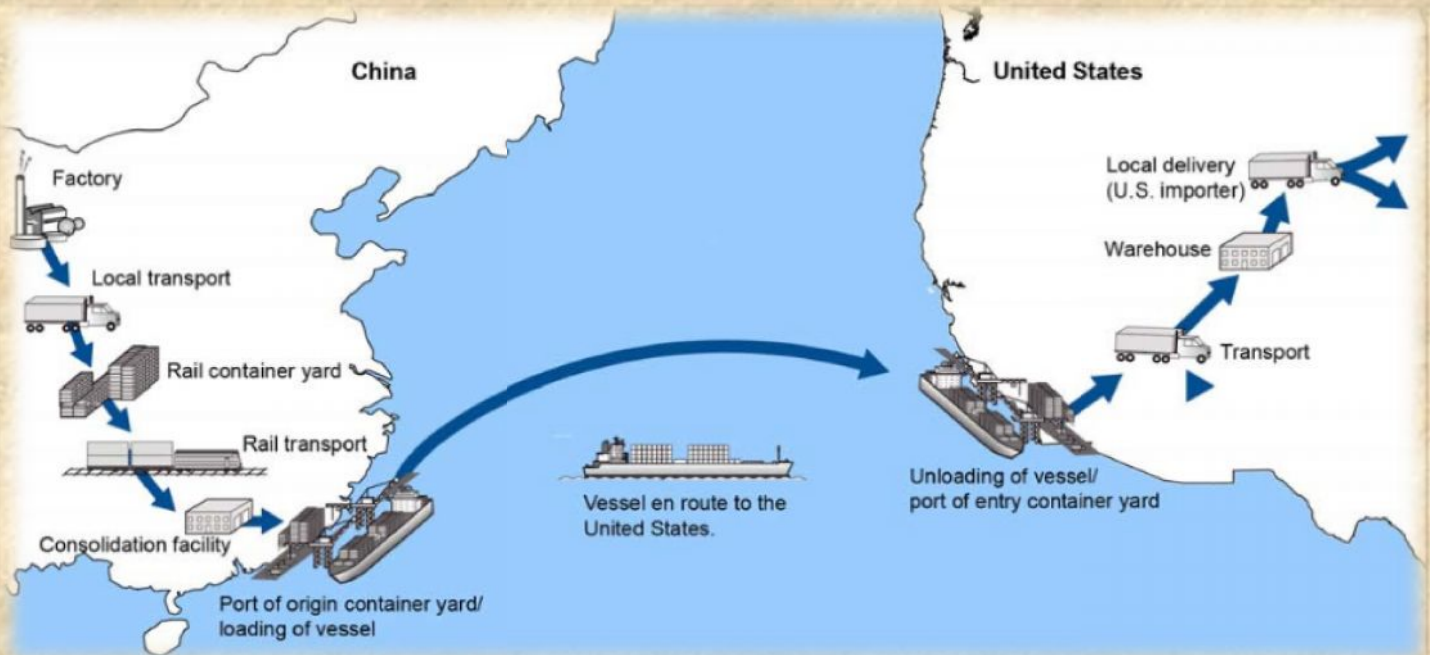
Starting up the container-security program in new ports is also expensive, and particularly difficult "in



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an era of constrained budgets," the Senate aide said. The committee currently is working with DHS officials to study the issue further and determine what, if any, practical steps the

Such a move has its drawbacks, however. In addition to potentially angering host countries where the U.S. presence would be pared down, the approach could be seen as contrary



department can take toward prioritizing the security of higher-risk ports, according to the staffer.

The aide said it was not yet clear whether the committee would take any further actions, such as conducting oversight hearings on the issue or addressing it through legislation.

One way to address the issue would be to move back to the United States DHS officials stationed at foreign ports who are primarily responsible for "targeting," a process by which the officials review computer assessments of which shipping containers at a port are potentially high risk and determine which containers require manual inspection. Much of this targeting work can be done remotely, the staffer said, particularly for ports where DHS officials have a well-established relationship with the host country and are confident of its ability to properly conduct the manual inspections.

Stationing more DHS officials who do mostly targeting work at home in the United States could save the program money, according to aide, who estimated that it could cost three times as much to station such officials abroad, because of the price of lodging, transportation and cost-of-living adjustments. These savings could free up enough funds to allow the program to expand into new, higher-risk ports.

to a strategy the department has embraced since the failed bombing of a commercial airline flight bound for Detroit in 2009. After the Christmas Day incident, in which the perpetrator was not apprehended until he reached U.S. soil, "DHS recommitted to this idea of having people overseas where they can facilitate inspections," the Senate aide said.

According to the GAO report, there also could be legal obstacles.

"For example, according to [U.S. Customs] and government officials in one country, a national law precludes the transmission of electronic scanned images other than to host government officials," the report says. "As a result, [DHS] officials must be present at each [Container Security Initiative] port in that country to view the scanned images."

The GAO report recommends that the department periodically assess the risks from all foreign ports that ship to the United States in order to "inform any future expansion of [the container-security program] to additional locations and ... determine whether changes need to be made" at ports already participating in the program.

The department in a Sept. 4 letter concurred with this recommendation, saying that it would formulate a process for conducting such



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assessments. DHS officials expect to complete the first assessment by August 2014 and to decide on any changes to the container-

security program by December 2014, according to the letter.

Read full report at: <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/657893.pdf>

Canadian city developed mathematical formula to evaluate risk

Source: <http://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20131017-canadian-city-developed-mathematical-formula-to-evaluate-risk>

The City of Hamilton, Ontario has ranked terrorism fourth on its list of top ten emergency risks. Terrorism ranks above flooding despite the fact that the city has never experienced a terrorist attack, yet flooding from major storms has cost the city millions in the past and has forced the city's emergency plan to be initiated twice.

CBC reports that Hamilton's emergency management office uses a mathematical equation to rate risks:

$$\text{Risk} = (\text{Probability} + \text{Frequency}) \times (\text{Sum of Consequences})$$

Consequences in the equation include fatality, injury, critical infrastructure damage, property damage, environmental impact, and social and economic impact.

Carla McCracken, Hamilton's emergency management coordinator, agreed that while the city has never had a terrorist attack, the potential consequences defined by the equation are reasons for the terrorism risk ranking.

Hazardous Materials and Explosions are ranked number one on the emergency risk list due to the frequency of occurrence. Past explosion or incidents related to hazardous materials include: a chemical fire in Stoney Creek in 1986; another chemical fire in Dundas in 1987, when 200 people had to be evacuated; the Lottridge St. recycling service fire which caused more than eighty homes to be evacuated; and a 25 August 2009 fire at Ancaster's Archmill woodworking factory which took seventy firefighters and eighty trucks to put out.

"The frequency of it (explosions) happening again was a little bit higher than other ones and the probability of it happening again with our community profile was also large," McCracken said.

Flooding is ranked fifth on the list, below Terrorism and Hazardous Materials and

Explosions, because the city has experience dealing with the issue. McCracken describes the response to a 2009 flooding incident in which twenty-six city facilities flooded. "We had first responders going in, helping people out of their homes, going into basements shutting off utilities. Public Works was blocking off roads." Hamilton's Emergency Management Act has been activated ten times since the act's enactment ten years ago. When the act is initiated, emergency staff related to the emergency hold response meetings with all appropriate city staff, including the mayor. Employees within the emergency team operate from the city's emergency management center to manage the staff on the ground and to make sure city services are functioning in areas outside the emergency zone.

The provincial government provided Hamilton with a list of potential risks and required city officials, part of a committee that included representatives from police, fire services, school boards, and community leaders, to select the emergency risks most likely to occur. "We then selected our model for analysis which basically gave us our formula," McCracken said. "Based on research we had done and the people around the table, that gave us our numbers... it is very qualitative in nature and influenced by the people around the table." McCracken notes that the emergency risk list is subject to revision every five years and may look different two years from now.

Top 10 risks, in order, for Hamilton, Ontario: Hazardous Materials and Explosions; Energy Supply Emergencies; Epidemics/Pandemics; Terrorism; Flooding; Structure Fire (major); Tornadoes (windstorm and microburst); Transportation Accident - Motor Vehicle; Ice Storms and Earthquake.



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Neutralizing WMD's on a Tabletop

Source: <http://www.engineering.com/DesignerEdge/DesignerEdgeArticles/ArticleID/6487/Neutralizing-WMDs-on-a-Tabletop.aspx>

Last week (Oct 2013) the OPCW (Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons) was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their work destroying chemical weapon stockpiles. This is a difficult and dangerous job.

In an attempt to make OPCW's job safer and more efficient, the Pentagon put out a call for a desktop device that can neutralize chemical and biological weapons without separating them from their



containers.

The Pentagon's idea revolves around using X-rays to radiate and destroy chemical and biological agents. While X-rays has been proven to destroy chemical agents like sarin gas, engineers have found it difficult to build a portable system.

However, **a new x-ray technique developed by a former Brookhaven National Lab researcher Young Bae could be a game changer.**

Bae's x-ray generation technique uses "warm dense matter" (WDM) to produce x-rays. The temperatures associated with WDM hover

around 11,000°C – temperatures most often observed in stars. In this state, the WDM atoms are smashed together so that the electron shells of two atoms fuse. Once the crushing force is released the two atoms separate releasing a cascade of x-ray energy.

Since discovering this technique, Bae has refined his method for creating x-rays into a tabletop apparatus. The Pentagon is looking to refine Bae's work. With the help of Los Alamos National Labs, Bae's system will be scaled up. Then over the next two years, the prototype will be tested on its ability to tune x-rays to destroy specific materials.

If the project is successful, the dangerous, time consuming and expensive work of the OPCW might be made easier and cheaper. With lower costs, chemical and biological stockpile holders like the US and Russia, might be more easily convinced to destroy their arsenals.

Russia says foils plot to attack chemical arms facility

Source: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/15/russia-chemical-plot-idUSL6N0I513E20131015>

Russian authorities said on Tuesday they had foiled a plot by Islamist radicals to bomb a chemical weapons facility and had arrested two suspects from the North Caucasus, where Moscow is battling an Islamist insurgency.

Militants have previously carried out deadly bombings in Moscow and other parts of Russia outside the mostly Muslim North Caucasus, but specific allegations of plots to attack sites holding weapons of mass destruction in nuclear-armed Russia are almost unheard of.

Authorities believe the suspects planned to build a bomb and attack the Maradykovsky chemical weapons storage and disposal facility in the Kirov region, about 1,000 km (620 miles) northeast of Moscow, the Federal Investigative Committee said.

"The suspects planned a terrorist attack ... that could have risked killing hundreds of people," it said in a statement.

It said the men had travelled north to the remote Kirov area from Moscow to plan the attack and it identified them as followers of Wahhabism - an ultra-conservative branch of Sunni Islam that is practised in Saudi Arabia and which has become a derogatory term for Islamist radicalism in Russia.

Investigators found bomb components and "literature with extremist content" in an abandoned house in the area where the suspects, aged 19 and 21, were living, the committee said.

It said the suspects were natives of the North Caucasus, a mountainous



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southern region not far from the Black Sea city of Sochi, where Russia hosts the 2014 Winter Olympics in February. The region is some 2,000 km (1,200 miles) from Kirov.

Insurgent leader Doku Umarov, a Chechen, has urged fighters to use "maximum force" to stop the Olympics taking place.

President Vladimir Putin has staked his reputation on the Games and ordered authorities to boost security in the North Caucasus, where the Islamist insurgency is rooted in two post-Soviet wars pitting Chechen separatists against the Kremlin.

After suicide bombings that killed dozens in the Moscow subway in 2010 and at a Moscow airport in 2011, Umarov called for more attacks on infrastructure in the Russian heartland, but no other major attacks have occurred outside the North Caucasus.

Russia inherited the Soviet Union's declared stockpile of 40,000 metric tonnes of chemical weapons.

In 1997 Moscow ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention, which requires member states to declare and dispose of all chemical weapons and production facilities.

Russia and the United States had pledged to destroy their chemical arsenals by 2012 but both missed the deadline. They have recently led diplomatic efforts to ensure Syria starts destroying its own chemical weapons stockpile.

As of March 2013, Russian authorities had destroyed more than 90 percent of the chemical weapons at the Maradykovsky facility and were disposing of stocks of the nerve agent soman, according to the Kirov regional government website.

Syria's chemical weapons can be destroyed within nine months: experts

Source: http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/most-of-syrias-toxins-can-be-destroyed-more-easily-than-officials-initially-thought/2013/09/26/66cd1ca2-26e3-11e3-b75d-5b7f66349852_story.html

Weapons experts from the United States and Russia say most of Syria's chemical weapons stockpile are kept as unweaponized liquid precursors, and thus could be neutralized in a short period of time without the risk that toxins could be stashed away by the regime for future use, or stolen by terrorists.

The *Washington Post* reports that a confidential assessment by the United States and Russia concludes that Syria's entire arsenal could be destroyed in about nine months, assuming that Syrian officials fully cooperate with the weapons inspectors.

This conclusion by the Russian and American experts was reached after they compared intelligence reports from the intelligence services of their respective countries.

The report submitted by the Syrian government last Saturday to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague supported the conclusions of the American and Russian experts.

The *Post* notes that analysts had concluded that Syria possesses more than 1,000 metric tons of chemical weapons, of which about 300 metric tons are sulfur mustard, the blister agent used in the First World War. Most of the remainder consists of chemical precursors of

nerve agents, described as being "unweaponized" and in "liquid bulk" form. The White House shared the analysts' conclusions in private briefings with weapon experts.

Experts who were not in the White House briefings said the findings are encouraging, since it is easier to destroy precursor chemicals than battlefield-ready liquid sarin or warheads already loaded with the toxin.

"If the vast majority of it consists of precursors in bulk form, that is very good news," Michael Kuhlman, chief scientist in the national security division at Battelle, a company that has supervised the destruction of much of the United States' cold war-era chemical stockpile, told the *Post*.

"Now you're dealing with tanks of chemicals that are corrosive and dangerous, but not nerve agents. And the destruction processes for those chemicals are well in hand."

Daryl Kimball, director of the Washington-based Arms Control Association, said that if UN inspectors can remove even one of the sarin precursors — or the equipment used for measuring and filling — they can all but eliminate Syria's ability to launch a chemical attack even before the stockpile is completely destroyed.



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“The mixing equipment itself is essential to using chemical agents,” Kimball said. “If you

prioritize the destruction of the equipment, you can largely deny Syria the ability to use these



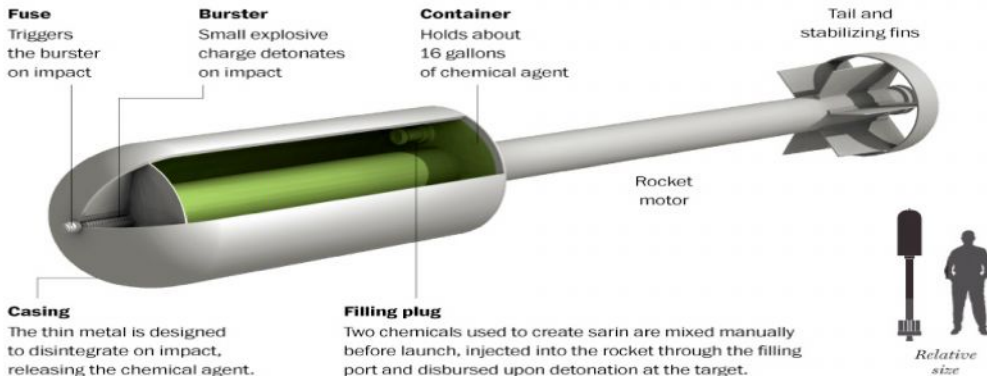
Blister agents cause painful blisters on contact with skin or mucus membranes. Syria is thought to have sulfur mustard (a.k.a. mustard gas) and possibly nitrogen mustard, which come in liquid, solid and vapor forms.



Nerve agents, the most toxic chemical weapons, are related to pesticides but are far more potent. A small dose can cause problems with the heart and with breathing, as well as confusion. A large dose can cause paralysis, suffocation and death.

Syria is suspected to have sarin, a liquid that can become vaporized, and VX, which is considered the most potent of all nerve agents. People can be exposed through their skin or through inhalation, or by ingesting contaminated food or water.

The example below is one type of munition that Syrian forces allegedly used to disseminate sarin.



Ways to dispose of chemical weapons

Each country does it a bit differently, but these are the three basic methods to dispose of chemical weapons. Any weapons destruction in Syria, whether done by the military or by private contractors, would occur under the watch of inspectors from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The United States has used all these methods.



Incineration

Machines dismantle and drain the weapons. One furnace incinerates the chemical, another sterilizes the metal parts, an armored one handles the explosives and a fourth may burn up items such as packing material. Emissions are filtered through various types of “scrubbers” to prevent most toxic gases from releasing into the atmosphere.

- Pro:** A large plant can be fully automated and can handle large stocks of weapons.
- Con:** Fears about airborne emissions make these facilities controversial. (Russia prohibits this method for disposing of live chemical weapons.) Large facilities can be costly and can take years to build.



Hydrolysis

Machines drain out the chemical and break it down by mixing it with hot water, often adding a caustic agent such as lye or bleach. The result is a less toxic chemical that can be incinerated, sent to an industrial waste treatment facility or combined with microbes that break it down further. Metal is decontaminated so it can be recycled.

- Pro:** This method neutralizes the chemical. A large facility can be fully automated and produce little emissions. The technology can be scaled down for smaller projects.
- Con:** A large facility is very costly and takes years to build.



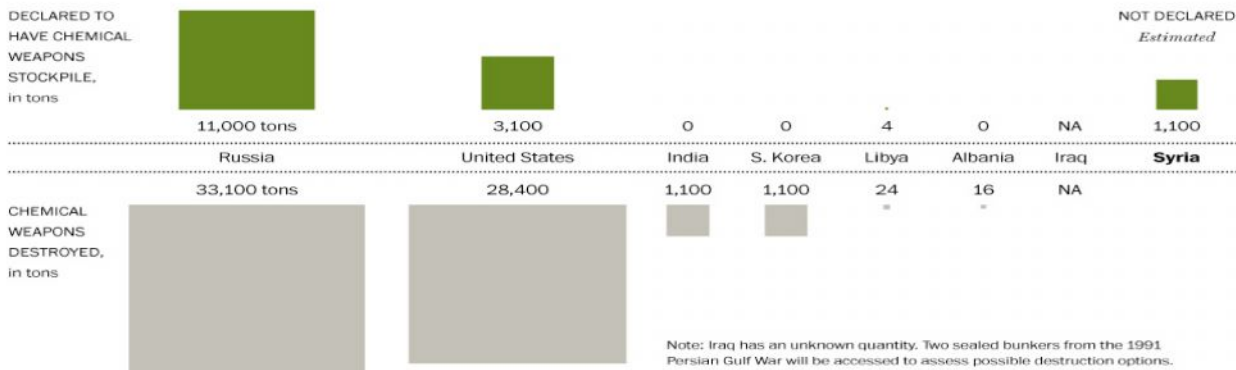
“Bang boxes”

Technicians put explosives on the weapons and detonate them in a mobile steel tank. In some boxes, the explosion is enough to incinerate the chemical agent. In others, chemicals may be added to neutralize it. Any remaining liquid is sent to a treatment plant, solids go to a toxic waste landfill, and gas is filtered and sometimes burned.

- Pro:** These mini-incinerators can be flown or trucked nearly anywhere. They can destroy an entire shell, rocket or drum and neutralize the chemicals in a fully sealed container.
- Con:** Humans need to handle the weapons, and the boxes aren’t big enough to efficiently destroy large caches.

Chemical weapons stockpiles around the world

Seven countries have declared chemical weapons under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). The only countries outside the CWC regime known to have chemical weapons are Syria and North Korea. Two other countries — Israel and Egypt — are suspected to have stockpiles, but there is no public information.



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weapons again on Syrian soil.”

The United States and Russia agree on the size and nature of Syria's chemical stockpile and on how to destroy it, but there are disagreements:

- The two governments do not agree on the number of storage sites for chemical munitions in Syria
- The two sides disagree on where the physical destruction of sarin and other

toxins should take place. The United States wants to remove all chemical weapons from Syria as quickly as possible, in case President Bashar al-Assad changes his mind, while Russia wants the weapons destroyed on Syrian soil. Moscow said that Russia was prepared to provide troops to guard the chemicals as they are being destroyed.

EDITOR'S COMMENT: How can they make such statements? It reminds me the known medical statement: "The patient has three months of life left!"

Infographic source: <http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/page/world/what-chemical-weapons-does-syria-have/454/>

A tale of two WMD crises

By Ramesh Thakur

Source: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/comment/a-tale-of-two-wmd-crises-20131020-2vutz.html>

There are eight common elements in the two big breakthrough stories on Iran and Syria from

components, material, facilities and skills to be just one screwdriver away from the bomb.



New York on September 26.

First, both crises are in the Middle East, a region racked by turmoil and upheaval since the outbreak of the Arab Spring two years ago. The regional fault lines, and the ways in which they connect to global major power fault lines, have been deeply unsettled and the contours of the new Middle East are anything but clear. Second, both crises have been about weapons of mass destruction, nuclear (Iran) and chemical (Syria). Iran is party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty but has long been suspected of using its technology-accessing benefits as a cover to acquire and develop

Iran reiterated its abhorrence and rejection of nuclear weapons. Syria has agreed to join the Chemical Weapons Convention. Third, enforcement measures in both cases are routed through multilateral arms control treaties. The NPT requires Iran to subject suspicious elements of its nuclear energy program to monitoring and inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The normative taboo against chemical weapons is so strong that countries that have them acquired them clandestinely. Syria has confirmed suspicions that it has them. The value, utility and continuing relevance of key multilateral arms control regimes are reaffirmed. There is life yet in multilateralism. Fourth, the crises highlight starkly the key difference between the two global WMD regimes. The CWC is universal, non-discriminatory and binding with equal legal force on all. Consequently the Security Council can demand with great moral authority that Syria sign the CWC and agree to the verifiable



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and irreversible destruction of its chemical weapons stockpile and infrastructure. Even though Russia and the US have not been able to meet the agreed deadline for the destruction of their own stockpiles, they have, nonetheless, led by example.

By contrast, the NPT divides the world into those who have and those who must never get nuclear weapons. There is something unsettling about those who possess 17,000 nuclear weapons demanding Iran must not get even one.

Of course, Iran has signed the NPT and voluntarily surrendered its right to acquire nuclear weapons. But the five permanent Security Council members (P5) have also signed the NPT and committed themselves to eliminating all nuclear weapons. It is hard to see how states in breach of treaty obligations can legitimately enforce its provisions on others. If they do so not based solely on military might, this is an inducement to others to get nuclear weapons and join the ranks of the high and mighty.

Fifth, the big WMD elephant in the Middle East room is Israel which has not ratified the CWC nor signed the NPT. It does not admit to having any but is believed to possess about 80 nuclear weapons. An undeclared but barely disguised nuclear-weapons capability compensates Israel for small size and population, lack of strategic depth and an appropriate response to the multiplicity of existential threats confronting it. The low-cost policy of deliberate ambiguity has given Israel the benefits of existential deterrence without directly opposing US non-proliferation objectives.

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani made much of this in his UN speech, insisting that no country should possess nuclear weapons "since there are no right hands for these wrong weapons."

The P5 and Western nations' double standards on their own and Israeli nuclear weapons, respectively, are going to get progressively harder to disguise, deny and sustain.

Sixth, the crises demonstrate the merits and virtues of pursuing a balanced strategy of sticks and carrots. No country likes to capitulate, and be seen to do so, under threats. Western leaders seem to believe that their own resolve is stiffened under public external pressure but others will behave in the opposite way. It is almost as if Washington has forgotten

how to do carrots. On Syria, Russia and China agreed to a draft Security Council resolution only when the US, France and Britain gave ground on a built-in authorisation of military strikes if President Bashar al-Assad failed to comply.

On Iran, President Barack Obama assured Tehran Washington was not seeking regime change and respected its right to access peaceful nuclear energy, and acknowledged complaints about past US interference in Iran's internal affairs and for having overthrown an Iranian government during the Cold War.

Seventh, the most opportune moment for ending a protracted conflict is when it reaches a mutually painful stalemate and both sides recognise they are not going to win on the battlefield but are paying high costs while the conflict continues.

The tough sanctions have hurt Iran badly. Syria's brutal civil war has taken a heavy toll on all sides. It will take years for the country to recover after the war ends.

The US has paid a heavy price militarily, financially and reputationally for its addiction to invading countries in and around the Middle East. Repairing relations with Iran could help it achieve core objectives in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. As Washington geared up for yet another war of choice in August in Syria, the warmongering policy elite and commentariat were shocked into sobriety by the collapse of domestic, Congressional and global support. Perhaps the default democratic settings of the great American republic have reasserted themselves.

Finally, the twin crises prove the continuing utility of the United Nations. The Security Council remains the cockpit for addressing geopolitical upheavals. The assumption behind its permanent membership and veto is that coercive international action by the society of states is dangerous unless the major powers are in agreement.

If and when they do agree, the UN machinery can translate consensus into action. Both assumptions have been validated.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop by all accounts did a great job chairing a session of the Security Council at a time when the UN also adopted an Australia-shepherded arms trade treaty. While the Coalition basks in the after-glow of Kevin Rudd's successful bid for Security Council election, council membership



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will hopefully educate them about the changing realities of world politics.

On one hand, there is no position from which Australia could have possibly helped its US ally more effectively than as president of the Security Council. On the other, as the US

slowly cedes relative power and influence, there is no interest more vital to Australia's security and values than strengthening the UN-centred rule of law on the use of force, domestic and international.

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Despite Nobel Prize, Full Removal of Syria's Chemical Weapons Unlikely

By Jonathan Spyer

Source: <http://www.meforum.org/3647/syria-chemical-weapons-removal>

The first reports emerging from the effort to relieve the Assad regime of its chemical weapons capacity suggest that the regime is cooperating with the inspectors from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The latter organization has been tasked by the United Nations with overseeing the process of destroying Assad's CW capability.

The process is set to involve two distinct stages. In the first and more straightforward phase, Syria's ability to produce chemical weapons will be removed. In the second phase, Syria's actual stockpiles of chemical weaponry are to be destroyed. The first phase of the mission is intended to be completed by November 1. The second phase is likely to take a lot longer.

The OPCW inspectors face a task of unparalleled complexity. Never before has a country in the midst of civil war offered up its chemical weapons capacity to international review and destruction. It is not at all clear that the inspectors will succeed. The sincerity of the Assad regime in facilitating this process remains deeply open to question, and the logistical challenges are also enormous.

Regarding the regime's sincerity: on the one hand, the regime ought to have every interest in proving cooperative with the inspectors. The agreement whereby Syria agrees to give up its CW with one stroke transformed Assad from the potential target of Western military action to a key partner in an internationally mandated process. The agreement effectively ended any possibility of Western military intervention in the Syrian civil war. For as long as the process of verification and destruction of Syrian CW continues, it is vital that the regime survive.

And this process could continue for more than a year.

However, there are two complicating elements. First, allegations have arisen that the regime is attempting to remove parts of its CW capability across the border to Lebanon — where its Hezbollah allies hold sway — and to Iraq.

A former senior officer handling chemical weapons in Assad's army, Brigadier-General Zaher Shakat, told the British *Sunday Telegraph* newspaper that he possesses intelligence confirming that at least one convoy of 20 vehicles carrying CW materials has crossed the border between Syria and Lebanon, transferring the material to Hezbollah.

Israeli sources, at this stage, dismiss these reports, suggesting that they form part of Syrian rebel propaganda efforts. At the same time, the possibility that the regime may at a certain stage attempt to remove CW in the direction of Lebanon or Iraq is not ruled out by Israeli officials. In particular, as autumn turns to winter and cloudy skies reduce visibility, the possibility of such actions increases. For Israel, clear evidence of the transfer of CW to Hezbollah would constitute a "red line" likely to produce a military response of the kind already witnessed four times in the course of the last year.

The second problem regarding Syria's CW capability is a logistical one. Once concentrated in a small number of sites, Syria's CW capacity is now spread between 50 to 70 separate locations. The movement of material took place when a U.S. strike on Syria seemed imminent, and was carried out by Unit 450 of the Syrian army — the main command and



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control center for the Syrian CW program. It will be the task of the OPCW inspectors, in cooperation with the Syrian authorities, to locate all these sites and to oversee the process of the handing over or destruction of the CW materials there — in conditions of civil war. This is an immense challenge. In this regard, the blithe optimism of U.S. officials and the decision of the Nobel Committee to award the peace prize to OPCW seem premature, and somewhat bizarre. Secretary of State John Kerry went on the record on October 7, saying: We're very pleased with the pace of what has happened with respect to chemical weapons in a record amount of time. ... I think that was a terrific example of global cooperation. I think it's also credit to the Assad regime for complying rapidly as they are supposed to.

OPCW officials also praised the "constructive" attitude being taken by the Assad regime.

Such statements seem to ignore both the demonstrably questionable commitment of the Assad regime to ridding itself of its CW capacity in accordance with the international agreement on this, and the enormous difficulties inherent in the successful implementation of this in conditions of civil war. On balance, it is most likely given his previous pattern of behavior that Assad will seek to drag out the process for as long as possible while giving up something less than the entire inventory of his CW capacity.

Given the previous pattern of behavior of the current U.S. administration and the "international community," it is likely that Assad will get away with it.

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Chemical, Biological & Radiological Threats to Aviation: what are we up against?

By Ilja Bensen and Elsa Schrier

Source: <http://www.cbmeportal.com/chemical-biological-radiological-threats-to-aviation-what-are-we-up-against/>



Security has been a big issue for civil aviation for decades. Airports and aircraft have proved to be a susceptible target for terrorist attacks as the list of incidents is extensive and gets longer every year despite strict security measures. Since the end of the Cold War new threats have also emerged. This includes the risk of terrorists using Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) means. It is therefore of great relevance to have insight in these threats to civil aviation. However, this is

easier said than done: CBRN is not simple. For each of the four letters of the acronym, there are multiple sub categories of agents. The large number of CBRN agents in combination with a hard to estimate number of potential terrorists, results into a wide-ranging threat spectrum that does not allow for easy targeted countermeasures. This article presents an overview of the threat of CBRNe terrorism against civil aviation based on the IB Consultancy Risk



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Assessment Methodology. This method was also used to develop the lists of agents used within the European Union to monitor for CBRNe threats.

What is CBRN?

Attacks with CBRN agents have a low probability but potentially an enormous impact. When a terrorist uses an automatic weapon or an explosive device, he creates a hazard with a bang and a clear immediate danger. For CBRN this is different, the real danger comes only after the bang; if there is a bang at all. Releasing a chemical or biological agent can easily go unnoticed. However, the consequences of such a release will not go unnoticed and the agent can show its lethality in days or weeks.

The initial attack may be small, in terms of low quantity and quality of the agents used and a limited number of casualties. However, the societal impact could be huge, not only just after the attack but also in the longer run. Whereas terrorism is in essence political violence, CBRN is the ultimate political weapon. The fear and societal impact of merely the threat of a CBRN agent can have a larger impact than an actual attack with explosives. Besides the societal impact, the practical consequences of an attack can also be long-lasting.

Contamination with CBRN agents can make an area unusable and uninhabitable for years. This is what we have seen with the buildings, postal office and senate, in the USA that were contaminated with Anthrax in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. It took more years and cost over one billion dollars to decontaminate the sites.

Now, what does CBRN look like? That is the million dollar question without an answer. CBRN agents can come in any form. Sarin is often transported as a liquid and vaporises quickly at room temperature. If it would reach a concentration of 70mg per m³, a male adult could die after being in such a room for only five minutes. You can kill a man with a tiny droplet of Sarin. Toxins such as Ricin are much more lethal, and the amount needed to be lethal is hardly visible. For Bio agents, there is no 'quantity' of an agent. For bacteria, it is the number of colony-forming units that is used to determine dosage. However, these numbers are not simple math. For Anthrax for example, a lethal dose is considered to be 10.000

spores. For each gram of Anthrax, one would get 100 lethal doses of Anthrax (through inhalation). However, three of the casualties of the 2011 Anthrax attacks in the USA were old ladies who were most likely infected as a result of receiving a letter that was contaminated in the mail sorting centre. None of these women is estimated to have even inhaled a thousand spores each. Mortality rates resulting from biological agents are not a given, a lot depends on the health of the victim and its sensitivity to the agent.

The threat of CBRN terrorism

The threat of CBRNe terrorism has two main components: the capability of terrorists to use CBRN agents and their motivation to do so. Let's start looking at the first of these vectors, the terrorist capability. In order to execute a successful CBRN attack, the perpetrator needs to have a) a CBRN agent, b) a dispersal device which together form the CBRN weapons and c) a tactical plan on how to use that weapon. Getting access to CBRN agents is not so easy. The more dangerous the agent, the more difficult it is to get access. So, if a terrorist would like to use Smallpox in an attack, it means he first will need to steal the agent from one of the two places on earth where Smallpox is stored: the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the United States or the State Research Center of Virology and Biotechnology VECTOR in Koltsovo, Russia. Not an easy task. However, not all agents are difficult to obtain. To stay with biological agents, the best example is of course Anthrax. This agent is a normal bacteria species in most of the world: digging up some dead sheep often does the job. However, Anthrax dug up from the English country side is not the same as Soviet weapon grade Anthrax: it is just not as potent, and strong.

For chemicals digging is not a bad option either. World War I battlefields are a gold mine for unexploded ordnance, including munitions with a chemical payload. In Belgium, around one thousand pieces of munitions with a chemical payload are found each year. During the insurgency in Iraq, it is claimed that the insurgents (unknowingly) have used Mustard against Coalition forces when they exploded old munitions as road side bombs.

This means that one can sometimes find chemical weapons on the side of the road: either as a failed roadside



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bomb or as a shell dug up by a Belgian farmer. Some chemical agents also have a 'normal' use such as Chlorine and Ammonia. The concentration and quantity of the agent will determine if it is usable as a weapon.

However, a terrorist does not need to steal, buy or find a CBRN agent; he can also produce an agent himself. The internet is full of websites and forums on which recipes for the production of agents are exchanged. Jihadi websites are used to exchange often very dangerous recipes. That making a CBRN agent is not impossible was shown in 1995 with the most (in)famous CBRN terrorist attack, when the Aum Shinrikyo group attacked the Tokyo subway on 20 March 1995 with Sarin. The terrorists used a low quality agent and used the most simple and crude (and ineffective) dispersal device: plastic bags punctured with holes. This brings us to the second part of a CBRN weapon: the dispersal device. The simplest device would be a bowl with Sarin placed in a HVAC system: the Sarin slowly vaporises and is dispersed through a building, vessel or plane. However, devices that are a little smarter can still be fairly effective. Most agents need to be dispersed as small particles or in a mist of droplets, other agents need to be dispersed as a gas. For all these agents, a simple deodorant spray canister will suffice: one removes the contents of an innocent looking deodorant spray and fills it with a CBRN agent and some pressure gas. The knowledge for making such simple devices and even basic agents is limited. Cooking Sarin is a different story. However, if we match the required knowledge, experience and lab equipment to those of an average chemistry student, we seem to have a perfect match. Samir Azzouz was a home grown terrorist who was arrested in The Netherlands in 2004. During the search of his house, plans of Schiphol airport were seized. In 2005, he was arrested again, now at the Chemistry College in Leiden, where Samir studied to be a chemist: a perfect study for a CBRN terrorist.

We can therefore conclude that it is not that difficult for a terrorist to obtain a CBRN capability. Although it may be somewhat difficult to gain entrance to the CDC to steal a sample of Smallpox, it will most likely not be so difficult to dig up some Anthrax, or to buy it from a research institute as a biochemistry student. The same is true for chemicals: cooking Sarin might stretch the terrorist

capabilities somewhat, but picking up some roadside munitions from WWM is not that hard.

When it comes to motivation of terrorists, it is more difficult to make a proper assessment. Unfortunately, we have limited access to research on the motivation of terrorists on the use of CBRN. However, what we do know is that some terrorist groups have used CBRN agents, or have tried to use them. Islamist groups such as Hamas, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Riyad us-Saliheyn Martyrs' Brigade and the East Turkistan Liberation Organization (ETLO) have attempted to use CBRN weapons. Al Qaeda's wish to use CBRN has never been a secret when Osama Bin Laden stated "Acquiring [chemical and nuclear] weapons for the defence of Muslims is a religious duty. (...)" and "It is the duty of Muslims to prepare as much force as possible to terrorise the enemies of God". Suleiman Abu Gheith (Al-Qaeda Spokesman) stated that "We have the right to kill four million Americans, two million of them children... and cripple them in the hundreds of thousands... Furthermore, it is our obligation to fight them with chemical and biological weapons, to afflict them with the fatal woes that have afflicted Muslims because of their chemical and biological weapons". However, whether these Islamist groups were really motivated to use CBRN agents or were just bragging themselves into a NATO target folder will probably never be known. However, none of these individuals or groups has successfully executed an attack.

CBRN Impact

Some actually refer to CBRN weapons as Weapons of Mass Disruption. The reason for this is the psycho-social impact of CBRN. Even the threat of a small quantity of an agent to be used against a certain target will have a significant impact. Although the Sarin Tokyo Subway attacks resulted in only eight casualties, 5510 people reported to hospitals with various complaints. Most of them could be considered "worried well": people who were impacted by the Sarin attack, but not physically injured. This is a typical example of when the use of a CBRN agent did not result in mass destruction, but in mass disruption.

Although we often like to think so, terrorists are not psychopaths: they don't kill for the sake of it; violence is a means to an end. Opinions may differ on whether or not it is justified violence;



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the violence is meant to accomplish political change. Although this article is not the place for the “one man’s terrorist, other man’s freedom fighter discussion”, the political component of terrorism is crucial in understanding the value and danger of CBRN terrorism. A terrorist does not kill to kill, but to achieve an effect on a society: terror. When society has reached its threshold, it will initiate political change, such as the new government in Spain after the Madrid bombings in 2004. It seems that a terrorist needs less physical impact (casualties) with a CBRN attack to achieve a certain political effect than he would need with conventional means. This means that a CBRN scenario may need less of an agent, and needs to be less lethal to have a societal and therefore political impact, and therefore, a CBRN attack could be more feasible for more groups than most of us have always thought. A terrorist does not have to kill thousands of people, he wants to scare them.

Countering the threat: Detection, Protection and Training

Airports have a number of standard countermeasures in place to increase security. The aviation security rules inside the EU are based on standards contained in International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) rules and on the security measures laid down by the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC). In order to face possible terrorist attacks, EU security rules for instance establish a list of prohibited articles to be carried into the security restricted area and the cabin of an aircraft. However, most airports pay only limited attention to CBRN in terms of training and planning. Security staff is not trained in CBRN awareness and detection of CBRN means proves to be hard.

Despite these limitations, the most important countermeasure when it comes to CBRN is still detection. Explosives and automatic gunfire are hard to miss, but a terrorist releasing Anthrax in your HVAC system is more difficult to notice. Without detection equipment, you will not know you are under attack until it is too late. For both chemical and radiological agents there is plenty of equipment available on the market that can detect the vast majority of CBRN agents. Detection is also the starting point for staff to start using personal protective equipment (PPE). Airport and airline staff does not need the Level A space suits some first responders

wear. It would be good though to have at least escape hoods and facemasks with the right canisters or pressured air for staff members. Most of the danger of CBRN agents comes from inhaling or ingesting these agents. Concentrations must be really high before people are incapacitated by skin contamination or by radiation. For 95% of all relevant scenarios, respiratory protection is the most important protection and often the only protection people need.

Using protective equipment requires training. Not just training on how to don a mask, but more importantly on what to do when you are protected. Staff with PPE can actually help passengers and guests in the terminal building in evacuating the premises. However, those staff members should have confidence in their equipment, and should understand what they can do, and what they cannot do. For flight crews, CBRN training should not only be about using PPE, but should be a CBRN awareness training in which they learn how to recognise a CBRN incident, even when they lack CBRN detection equipment.

Finally, detection, protection and training need to be part of an airport/airline CBRN doctrine. This doctrine should include choices on what to do for different scenarios. For example, if a CBRN agent is released in the departure hall, should we turn off the HVAC system, or turn it to maximum? Most guidelines suggest (or instruct) to turn the HVAC off, however simulating a CBRN attack on your airport may show that you actually need different countermeasures which are more appropriate for your circumstances.

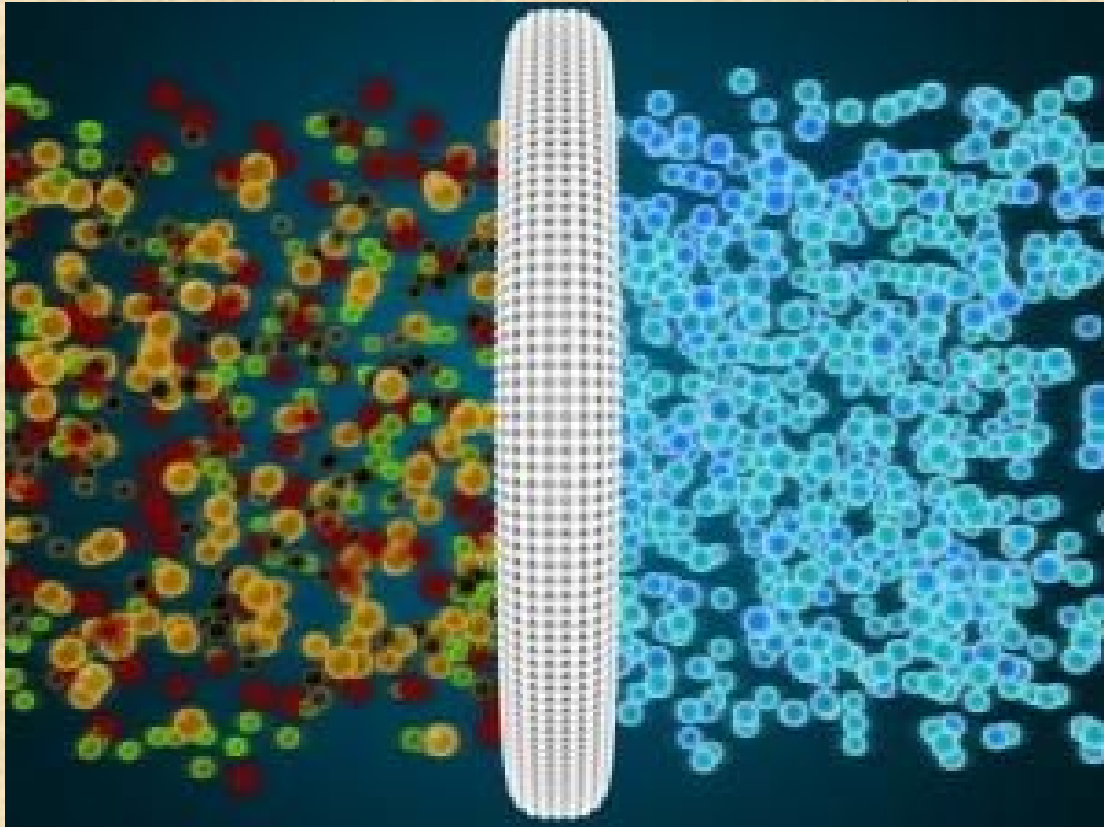
The most important thing you need when dealing with the threat of CBRN terrorism is knowledge. Without understanding what the threat is, how it can manifest itself, what the impact may be and how to deal with it, it is difficult to act in an effective way. Buying detectors, masks and training is nice, but if airport or airline security management does not know what CBRN means, it will be difficult to use the resources at hand in the right way. Knowledge also means having a concept or methodology of addressing the CBRN threat. The presented risk assessment methodology based on the terrorist’s CBRN capabilities and intent is a helpful tool in accurately assessing the CBRN threat to civil aviation.



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Israeli and American Companies Team Up to Provide CBRN Filtration

Source: <http://i-hls.com/2013/10/israeli-and-american-companies-team-up-to-provide-cbrn-filtration/>

Beth El Industries and DRS Technologies have entered into a teaming agreement to support the U.S. market for CBRN filtration. Beth El will be exhibiting at AUSA 2013, Washington, D.C.

DRS is a U.S.-based supplier of tactical environmental control units and environmental conditioning systems (ECS) for military vehicles. Beth El has been designing and manufacturing CBRN filtration systems for the past 40 years, its technologies used by NATO and by over 60 armies worldwide.

Combining the ECU/ECS with CBRN filtration is a natural next step, meant to deliver a complete environmental protection system to warfighters in forward operating bases (tents, mobile, and fixed shelters) as well as vehicles.

The Beth-El Industries filtration systems remove various contaminants from air entering into protected spaces: dust, toxins and even radioactive fallout. The same systems also clean the air already inside the protected spaces, removing any unwanted elements. The systems are easy to install, have low energy requirements and can be modified to protect almost any space: From armored vehicles to huge halls.

Beth-El Industries was established in the 1970s by a small community of deeply devout German-Christians, a very unusual and controversial origin for an Israeli company. Although met with some hostility after immigrating to Israel in 1963, the small group prospered and today Beth-El is considered a world expert in air filtration.

