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Assad Had the Upper Hand So Why Would He Gas His Own People?

By Dina Formentini – Chris Ernesto

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On March 30, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said that the future leader of Syria should be determined by the people of Syria.

This major policy statement by the US took regime change off the table, and was obviously great news for Bashar al-Assad. Combined with Syrian military gains on the ground, Assad was in the strongest position he'd been in since the war in Syria began.

So, why 5 days later would he gas his own people?

But even without a thorough investigation, and less than 72 hours after the alleged chemical attack took place, American political leaders and establishment media claimed that Assad carried out the attack on April 4. Hours later, the US launched 59 tomahawk cruise missiles on a Syrian airfield based on these unproven allegations, killing 9 civilians including 4 children in Idlib province.

Common sense, historical facts and circumstantial evidence suggest that it's unlikely that Assad gassed his own people earlier this week. In fact, it's much more likely that the chemical weapons were from al-Qaeda, ISIS and/or other anti-Assad factions. Indeed, a case can be made

that the attack was coordinated by the White Helmets, with US neoconservatives providing the script.

In 2013, US-supported, anti-Assad forces were losing ground in the war in Syria. Assad claimed that the rebels were using chemical weapons in Aleppo in a last-ditch effort to hold territory. Assad asked the UN to investigate his claims, and they agreed, and began an investigation in Syria. Within days of the UN inspectors' arrival, another chemical weapon attack occurred in Syria. Western media was quick to blame Assad, even though it defied logic that Assad would use chemical weapons when chemical weapons inspectors were inside Syria at his invitation.

As conservative columnist Pat Buchanan said,

“I would not understand or comprehend that Bashar al-Assad, no matter how bad a man he may be, would be so stupid as to order a chemical weapons attack on civilians in his own country when the immediate consequence...might be that he would be at war with the United States. So this reeks of a false flag operation.”

Former member of congress Ron Paul pointed out, “the group that is most likely to benefit from a chemical attack is Al-Qaeda. They ignite some gas, some people die and blame it on Assad.”

And Russian President Vladimir Putin said, “There is every reason to believe sarin gas was used, not by the Syrian army, but by opposition forces to provoke intervention by their powerful foreign patrons, who would be siding with the fundamentalists.”

Nonetheless, the Obama administration and other western leaders blamed Assad, and talk of US military action in Syria was contemplated.

Fortunately, journalists like Seymour Hersh helped put a halt to war talk, by revealing that it was indeed the US-supported rebels who used chemical weapons – weapons they received from Turkey, a US ally.

The sarin gas attack that just occurred in Syria is eerily similar to the attack that occurred in 2013: US-backed anti-Assad rebels are losing ground, a sarin gas attack occurs and US politicians quickly blame Assad without an investigation. One difference between today and 2013 is that the US military actually bombed a Syrian military target in “retaliation.” Another difference is that this time, Russian military is in Syria at the invitation of the Syrian government, so the risk of military confrontation with Russia is real.

The US announcement on March 30 that it would not seek regime change in Syria was a massive blow to neoconservatives, liberal interventionists, ISIS, al-Qaeda and all other anti-Assad factions who have been trying to oust Assad for years. In 2016 alone, the CIA reportedly spent \$1 billion supplying and training the rebel forces attempting to overthrow the Syrian government.

The Assad opposition is willing to revert to any means necessary, as history showed in 2013, so it's conceivable that this week's chemical attack was perpetrated by one of those factions who saw the window of opportunity to oust Assad closing.

And the US has a long history of making false claims to go to war, such as the Gulf of Tonkin incident, and the Iraq WMD claims — both of which led to major wars.

Given this, it is conceivable that the chemical weapons attack in Syria was perpetrated by The White Helmets, with the goal of tricking the US into taking military action against Assad, something the White Helmets have pushed for years.

As Max Blumenthal points out, The White Helmets, who call for a military imposed no-fly zone in Syria, were founded in collaboration with a wing of the USAID — the wing that has promoted regime change around the world — and have been provided with \$23 million in funding from the department.

Money to the White Helmets is just part of the \$339 million that the USAID has allotted for “supporting activities that pursue a peaceful transition to a democratic and stable Syria.”

Russian deputy ambassador to the UN said on Wednesday that allegations that Assad used chemical weapons this week are based on “falsified reports from the White Helmets”, an organization that has been “discredited long ago”.

This doesn't mean the White Helmets were involved in Tuesday's attack, or that the attack itself didn't really happen, we're just asking the question.

With that said, clearly the neocons and all anti-Assad forces have a lot more to gain from this week's chemical attack than does Assad. And Assad has much more to lose than any of those groups. And this week's attack followed the same script used during the 2013 attack, and that attack was wrongly blamed on Assad, as we suspect this attack is as well.

Although, it is too early to know what really happened, one of the possibilities is that the Syrian military bombed an al-Qaeda hideout, not knowing that chemical weapons were in the building, and the gas spread, killing people, as Russian officials have pointed out. But it's odd that the White Helmets just happened to be on the ground, and rapidly produced an HD video complete with a script that was read on most major media outlets within hours of the attack.

Other than the people responsible for the alleged chemical attack this week, nobody really knows what happened, including us. Now that the US has attacked Syria, Russia's ally, the question is, will Russia back down? If they don't, we may look back at this week's attack as a flashpoint to the start of a military confrontation with Russia. And given that this could lead to World War III, we think it's worth the time to consider all possibilities, including the ones mapped out here.