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Has the US Given Israel a Green Light To Attack Syria?

by Eric Margolis

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A senior Syrian government spokesman just confirmed his nation did indeed possess chemical weapons, and might employ them against a "foreign aggressor."

The embattled regime of Bashar Asad just managed to shoot itself in both feet, provide ammunition to Syria's enemies, and give them yet another excuse to intervene in its raging civil war.

Western governments and media that have become cheerleaders for Syria's rebels, went into full trumpet mode, issuing dire warnings of Syria's "threat of weapons of mass destruction." Israeli and the US officials warned they might have to seize Syria's chemical arsenal lest it fall into the hands of Lebanon's Hezbollah. Shades of Iraq and Saddam Hussein's wmd's.

The bumbling Damascus regime was too inept to explain that Syria had acquired a limited arsenal of chemical weapons over the past twenty years as a counter-force to Israel's tactical nuclear weapons. Western media barely mentioned this important point.

During the 1973 Arab-Israel War, Moscow informed Damascus that Israel was readying tactical nuclear-armed missiles, land mines, and bombs to halt what looked like a Syrian armored breakthrough on the Golan Heights. Damascus was also targeted by Israeli nuclear weapons. Syria determined to obtain a limited deterrent to forestall any future such nuclear threats.

Syria's arsenal of mustard, cyanide, and nerve gas is loaded into air-delivered bombs, short-ranged Scud or SS-21 missiles, or short-ranged artillery shells. Chemical weapons are not weapons of mass destruction. They have limited killing power and are subject to weather conditions.

The cries of alarm by western media simply ignored this fact. As they did the point that lightly armed Hezbollah would likely be unable to obtain or employ such weapons even if it had them and decided to risk suicide.

In the kind of urban warfare now going on in Syria, chemical weapons would have little use. Far more effective and deadly would be the thermobaric fuel air explosives employed by Russia, US, and Israel that rip apart the lungs of soldiers fighting from cover in ruined buildings or bunkers. Israel has the Mideast's largest arsenal of chemical and biological weapons.

Israel's military establishment and righthwing parties have made no secret of their yearning for revenge against Hezbollah, which inflicted a short, sharp defeat on Israel's army in southern Lebanon in 2006. Nor have Israel's expansionist rightists given up the ambition of former leader Ariel Sharon (who remains alive but in deep coma) of turning Lebanon into an Israeli protectorate ruled by Maronite Christian rightists. And diverting some of southern Lebanon's water to Israel.

As fighting raged in Syria, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak disclosed that he had asked the military to prepare for a possible attack on targets in Syria to secure strategic weapons in the event the Asad regime collapses. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued a similar threat to attack Syria.

Israeli officials also threatened to occupy what's left of Syria's Golan Heights to supposedly prevent them from turning into a "terrorist haven." Today, Israeli heavy artillery on Golan is only 30 km from Damascus.

Is Washington giving Israel a green light to attack Syria as a consolation prize for delaying an attack against Iran? Certainly, overthrowing the Asad government has become an obsession in Washington. The road to Tehran runs through Damascus, chant US neoconservatives and many bellicose Republicans.

Further raising the temperature, Turkey is threatening to occupy a heavily Kurdish chunk of northern Syria which it claims is being used to launch attacks into Turkey. Why Turkey is thinking about acquiring more rebellious Kurds when it can't handle its own remains unclear. But formerly neutral Turkey is getting more deeply involved each day in Syria, arming and supplying anti-Asad rebels and now rumbling about "security zones" on the border. Ankara's machinations in Syria threaten to undo much of the success of its former "no problems" policy with its neighbors.

The US, France, Turkey and Israel have all finalized their contingency plans for attacking Syria. The biggest winner in such a scenario would be Israel, as it was in the US war against Iraq.

Sending Syria into turmoil would eliminate the most important supporter of the Palestinians resistance, cut off Hezbollah, leave it vulnerable to a final assault, and isolate Iran.