

Damascus Papers

Sixty per cent of the Christians of Syria are now believed to have fled their country. (Robert Fisk, 9/26/13)

With the decision to arm the opposition fighting Syrian President Assad, the United States effectively declared war on Syria's indigenous Christians — a continuation of the same war it has waged on Christians throughout the Mideast, resulting in the abuse, death, and mass exodus. Ironically, if not absurdly, the Obama administration is presenting its current war as a war to safeguard the “human rights” and “freedoms” of the Syrian people, a *humanitarian war* to be executed by Tomahawk missiles. An even greater irony is the CIA's involvement in the mass sarin gassing of Syrian children.

At root the controversy is about the green light the Obama administration gave the House of Saud, also Qatar, to use NATO transit points in Turkey to infiltrate Wahabi religious extremists into Syria. The flavor of the Wahabi movement can be derived from last year's fatwa issued by the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia to destroy all churches in the Arabian Peninsula. In light of the heinous attacks conducted against Christians in Syria, we see where all this is tending, namely, to the complete eradication of Christianity in the land of its cradle. But it is not just in Syria that Wahhabi-Salafi ideology has been threatened, but also against Russia itself, particularly in Chechna. Islamic expert Roman Silantyev pointed this out, that “Wahhabi leaders should mind that not long ago wars were declared for even more minor issues. And while we haven't got down to it we can liquidate all centers of Saudi influence in Russia, and thanks to God, it has been intensively realized in Russia this year. And it won't take long to ban Wahabi ideology in Russia, special thanks for it to various great muftis who are not embarrassed to speak about their true intentions,”

It is not that Wahabi-Salafi ideology has deep roots in Washington, D.C. Rather, the ideology of divide and conquer rules supreme. “Let's you and him fight” is the order of the day, and let the devil pick up the hindmost.

While Western governments and mainstream media outlets downplay the foreign nature of the death squads roaming the Syrian countryside, preferring to portray the conflict as a Syrian affair, in reality the so-called rebels rank and file consist largely of foreign fighters who have been organized, trained, armed, and encouraged by Anglo-American powers to enter Syria and join in what they believe is a jihad and the establishment of an Islamic caliphate.

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SYRIAN CHRISTIANS TURNING TO RUSSIA FOR PROTECTION

October 16, 2013

About 50,000 Syrian Christians want to apply for Russian citizenship. In a letter to the Russian Foreign Ministry, they said that they were not planning to flee Syria, but if threatened with physical elimination, they would pin their hopes on Russia as the guarantor of their survival.

The letter reached Moscow through diplomatic channels. It says that the West-backed terrorists are prepared to go to any lengths to wipe Christians out of Syria. The authors of the letter have no intention of fleeing the “land on where Jesus walked” and promise to defend their “homeland, dignity and faith”.

They see Russia as the guarantor of “peace and stability”. They are not asking for money or humanitarian aid, but just hope to obtain Russian citizenship. “We will be under the protection of Russia if we face the threat of being physically eliminated by terrorists,” the letter says.

Considering what’s going on in Syria, their wish to have Russian passports looks justified, Stanislav Tarasov, Director of the Middle East-Caucasus research center, told the Voice of Russia.

“For them, it’s a laissez-passer. No one knows what will happen to Syria. Some forecasts suggest that, with or without Assad, Syria may become a confederation, or it may split into three or four parts and cease being single state. That’s why the Syrian Christians are trying to secure Russia’s support,” he said.

About 50,000 Syrians put their signatures under the address – medics, engineers, lawyers and businessmen residing in the Kalamoun area near Damascus.

WHISTLEBLOWER REVEALS U.S. STATE DEPT. SHIPS ARMS DIRECTLY TO AL-QAEDA

Kit Daniels — Prison Planet.com Sept 25, 2013

A former CIA gun runner revealed that the U.S. Ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens, was killed in the Sept. 11, 2012 attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi in order to cover up the U.S. State Department's direct arm shipments to al-Qaeda.

William Robert "Tosh" Plumlee started his career as a CIA contract pilot in the late 1950s, delivering guns and ammunition on behalf of the agency to Fidel Castro. Plumlee confirmed that such arm deals are still common today, with the State Dept. shipping arms to al-Qaeda via the CIA.

During an interview with Alex Jones, Plumlee pointed out that Pat Smith, the mother of an information management officer also killed during the Benghazi attack, received little information from the Obama administration about her son's murder.

"I began to wonder 'why won't they tell her anything?'" He asked. "Then a contact of mine in the Middle East, a high-ranking NATO official, mentioned to me that he had reports that the ambassador [J. Christopher Stevens] had been complaining about the dispatches and cables that he had got from the State Department about the weapons being received and [Islamic] radicals armed, including Stinger missiles."

According to Plumlee, Steven was ordered to stand down after he asked the State Department what he should do about the American arm shipments to al-Qaeda.

"The ambassador and his people had written a series of field reports and cable dispatches advising our State Department that the rebel factions had been armed with U.S. weapons," he said. "Now my contention is this: if that is the case, why is that classified as a national security matter?"

Plumlee mentioned that Steven's field notes have not been released by the State Department.

These revelations suggest that after Stevens told the State Dept. that he did not want al-Qaeda receiving heat seeking missiles, he was killed in the attack on the U.S. consulate in

Benghazi which was designed to take out witnesses to the arms transfer and to suppress Stevens's reports.

The Obama administration then blamed the attack entirely on Islamic protestors enraged by the film Innocence of Muslims while refusing to answer why U.S. special forces were ordered not to aid Stevens and others during the assault.

The missiles in question, as well as the other weapons given to al-Qaeda, were transported to Libya by C-130s under the Direct Commercial Sales (DCS) program, which operates within the State Department.

As explained by New York Times best-selling author and former journalist Jim Marrs, the DCS program oversees the shipment of U.S. weapons and training to countries around the world.

Through its own internal investigations, the State Dept. admitted that firearms supplied by the DCS have ended up in the hands of foreign enemies.

Tying it all together, Plumlee stated that the weapons given to al-Qaeda were "U.S. made weapons that came from the DCS program, illegally transported by C-130s" into countries such as Turkey and Jordan and were "dispatched from CIA safe houses to the Syrian rebels."

As we have documented in the past, the Syrian rebels are predominantly al-Qaeda fighters who want to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad in order to install an Islamic state in Syria.

If al-Qaeda controls Syria, other nations could easily take advantage of the ensuing chaos and Syria's reduced sovereignty by extracting trillions of dollars in oil revenue from the country.

The Syrian rebels led by the Jabhat al-Nusra Front, the direct offshoot of al-Qaeda in Iraq, were described as the "most effective fighting force in Syria" after filling the void left by the secular Free Syrian Army.

Suffering from severe shortages in weapons and supplies, the Free Syrian Army began losing soldiers to the better armed and equipped al-Nusra Front.

Now it is known why the al-Nusra Front, and al-Qaeda worldwide, never seem to lack arms: they are receiving weapon shipments directly from the State Dept.

POTENTIAL US WAR ON SYRIA WAS BASED ON A SNUFF MOVIE

Finian Cunningham, September 21, 2013

Not only is it an act of criminal aggression against an innocent country - the supreme crime according to Nuremberg Principles - but that transgression would itself be based on another vile crime - the deliberate killing of children for propaganda purposes.

The notorious videos purporting to show the half-clothed bodies of dozens of lifeless Syrian children are the central component of US claims for launching a war against Syria. Suspiciously, this footage gained wide circulation on the internet and on international television news bulletins within hours of the alleged toxic gas attack on 21 August near Damascus.

Now it appears that those videos are part of an elaborate, diabolical fabrication, the circumstances of which are very different from what they are meant to assign.

Nobody is questioning the fact that the children are dead. But what transpires is that the children seem to have been murdered by some form of intoxication and that their deaths were then recorded by their killers - with the calculated intention of producing a propaganda video.

That propaganda purports to blame the Syrian government forces of using chemical weapons causing massive civilian casualties. That in turn is aimed at provoking outrage among world public opinion, which would underpin US military intervention on the basis of President Obama's so-called red line on the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

In other words, the world is being pushed into acquiescing to a US-led criminal war on Syria based on a vile "snuff movie."

In the world of vice, there can be few acts more criminal and morally depraved than that of making snuff movies. This illegal genre of film is where some unwitting victim is murdered on screen for the perverse gratification of those behind the camera and the eventual underground audience who indulge in such odious entertainment.

Usually, in the making of snuff movies, the persons recording the scene of death are the killers or their accomplices. These movies are, needless to say, highly illegal and confined to

a secretive subculture. Those who make snuff movies and watch them are complicit in murder, and the videos are in effect indictable evidence of their crime.

On close examination of the alleged gas attack videos that came out of Syria on 21 August, the blunt assessment is that the footage is nothing less than a snuff movie.

This is the shocking conclusion from an independent study carried out by Syrian Christian leader Mother Agnes Mariam el-Salib. Under the auspices of the Geneva-based International Institute of Peace, Justice and Human Rights, the study concludes that the infamous gas-attack videos showing dead children is a fabrication. That is, the children were not killed, as alleged, by Syrian government forces firing chemical weapons on the Ghouta suburb of Damascus.

According to the authors: “From the moment when some families of abducted children contacted us to inform us that they recognized the children among those who are presented in the videos as victims of the chemical attacks of east Ghouta, we decided to examine the videos thoroughly.”

Mother Agnes’ investigation goes on to say chillingly: “Our first concern was the fate of the children we see in the footages. Those angels are always alone in the hands of adult males that seem to be elements of armed gangs. The children that trespassed remain without their families and unidentified all the way until they are wrapped in the white shrouds of the burial. Moreover, our study highlights without any doubt that their little bodies were manipulated and disposed with theatrical arrangements to figure in the screening.”

The authors add: “Thus we want to raise awareness toward the humanitarian case of this criminal use of children in the political propaganda of the east Ghouta chemical weapons attack.”

Mother Agnes and her co-authors have submitted their findings to the UN Human Rights Committee in Geneva. But, tellingly, the report, which was published earlier this week, has received negligible coverage in the Western mainstream media.

It is not determined who actually killed the children and by what method. Some observers have pointed out that the victims appear to have tourniquets on their arms. That would suggest that they received a lethal injection.

It also appears that the children are not from the location of Ghouta. It is believed that

many of them were abducted by the foreign-backed militants during raids on pro-government villages in the Latakia area of northwest Syria during the weeks prior to 21 August.

That confers on the crime in Ghouta on 21 August the most hideous proportions. For what is deduced is that dozens of children were abducted for the fate of cold-blooded murder, to be videoed with the purpose of fabricating a crime falsely attributed to others for propaganda effect - propaganda to precipitate a war.

When we look at the choreographed way in which the US government and its Western allies have reacted to the incident and the videos, it is suggestive of collusion at some level. Several reports have tied the involvement of Saudi, Turk and Israeli intelligence with the supply of toxic chemicals to the foreign-backed militants fighting in Syria for the Western agenda of regime change against the government of President Assad. These intelligence agencies are closely aligned with those of the US, Britain and France.

The fundamental importance of the alleged gas-attack videos to the US and Western case for military intervention in Syria raises the question of how much do these governments know about the exact circumstances of the child deaths that ostensibly occurred in Ghouta on 21 August.

Apart from flawed interpretation of the inconclusive UN chemical inspectors' report released earlier this week, the other component of the US government's case for a military attack on Syria are the videos purporting to show the aftermath of a chemical weapons incident in Ghouta.

Appealing to Congress for military strikes on Syria earlier this month, US Secretary of State John F Kerry described those images as "sickening," and added that "the world must act on such horror."

Affecting an air of privileged briefing, members of Congress were taken into closed-door sessions. There, they watched the videos showing lifeless children lying in gaunt rooms in an unknown location, apparently having died from exposure to sarin or some other toxic gas.

It appears that US lawmakers viewed the same video footage that the rest of the world has also accessed via the internet and on television news bulletins. The viewing of such distressing scenes paved the way for the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations to vote for resolution 2021 backing President Obama's military attack on Syria.

While the momentum for war has abated in the past week because of the Russian-brokered deal to decommission Syrian government chemical weapons, nevertheless the US continues to threaten that military strikes still remain an option on the table.

US-led wars in the past have notoriously relied on false flags and pretexts, such as the sinking of the USS Maine, the Gulf of Tonkin incident and 9/11. But if the US commits to war on Syria, its lawlessness will have reached a new low. In that event, it will be a war of aggression based on a snuff movie.

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KERRY: THREAT OF US FORCE AGAINST SYRIA 'REMAINS REAL'

Sunday Sep 15, 2013

The threat of US military action against Syria remains "real", Washington's top diplomat said on Sunday a day after striking a deal with Russia to destroy Damascus's chemical weapons stockpile.

"The threat of force remains, the threat is real," US Secretary of State John Kerry said at a news conference in Jerusalem with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"We cannot have hollow words in the conduct of international affairs."

Kerry's remarks were made following a four-hour meeting with Netanyahu at which the two men discussed the US-Russian agreement on eradicating Syria's stockpile of chemical weapons, and also talked about the ongoing Middle East peace talks.

"Make no mistake, we have taken no options off the table," Kerry warned after news of the deal appeared to stave off the threat of a US-led military strike on the Syrian regime after a chemical attack last month on a Damascus suburb.

"The fact of weapons of mass destruction having being used against the people of their own state -- these are crimes against humanity and they cannot be tolerated," he said.

Under terms of the breakthrough deal struck in Geneva on Saturday following three days of talks between Kerry and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, the regime of President Bashar al-Assad has a week to hand over details of the quantity and location of all the

chemical agents in its possession.

The stockpile would then be turned over to international supervision and destroyed by mid-2014 in a deal which has won backing from China, a veto-wielding permanent member of the UN Security Council.

The accord was hailed as heading off a possible US-led strike and unspecified sanctions.

Kerry described the Geneva understandings as a "framework, not a final agreement", but one which had "the full ability to be able to strip all the chemical weapons from Syria." He described the agreement as "the most far-reaching chemical weapons removal effort" ever designed and one which stretched well beyond the scope of the Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993.

But he acknowledged its full implementation was crucial.

"This will only be as effective as its implementation will be."

"Just removing the chemical weapons doesn't do the job, we understand that... but it is one step forward, and it eliminates that weapon from the arsenal of a man who has proven willing to do anything to his people to hold on to power."

Standing next to him, Netanyahu said stripping Syria of its chemical stockpile would make the entire region "a lot safer" although he was quick to draw parallels with the threat posed by a nuclear Iran.

"The world needs to ensure that radical regimes don't have weapons of mass destruction because, as we've learned once again in Syria, if rogue regimes have weapons of mass destruction they will use them," he said.

"If diplomacy has any chance to work it must be coupled with a credible military threat," he said, referring directly to Iran and its nuclear programme, which Israel and much of the West believes is a front for developing a weapons capability.

"Iran must understand the consequences of its continual defiance of the international community by its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

"What is true of...Syria is true of Iran."

AHLUL BAYT NEWS AGENCY

September 14, 2013

Turkish prosecutor has filed a report to the court in southern Turkish city of Adana, showing Syria militants have been ordering and receiving chemical material from Turkey. On May 28 Turkish security forces found a 2-kg cylinder with sarin gas after searching the homes of terrorists from the al-Qaeda-linked al-Nusra Front who were previously detained.

According to media reports, sarin gas was found in the homes of suspected Syrian militants detained in provinces of Adana and Mersia following a search by Turkish police.

Five Turks and a Syrian citizen, named Haitam Kassapwho, who were arrested on the case for allegations of buying chemical weapons in Turkey, have pleaded not guilty, according to the English-language Hurriyet Daily News, which quoted from the indictment.

Prosecution attorney objected the ruling and presented the court with a 132-page document which contained evidence of the suspects' links to terrorist groups in Syria including al-Nusra Front and al-Qaeda-linked Islamic States on Iraq and Levant (Ahrar al-Sham), a report by the Voice of Russia said.

The document says that radical Salafis groups set up a channel for carrying out terrorist attacks inside Turkey.

According to the document al-Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham group had tried to buy large amounts of sarin nerve gas and chemical substances used in manufacturing poisonous materials.

The prosecution believes that the suspects have links to Syrian groups close to al-Qaeda and their leaders and were buying chemical materials from Turkey to send into Syria.

Citing telephone calls made by the suspects, the document shows they ordered at least ten tons of chemicals in total.

U.S. BEGINS SYRIAN WEAPON SHIPMENTS

WASHINGTON, Sept. 11 (Xinhua) -- The United States has begun delivering weapons to Syrian rebels over the past two weeks, which marks "a major escalation of the U.S. role" in the Syria conflict, a report said.

The move by the U.S. spy agency the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) ended months of delay in lethal aid that the Obama administration promised long ago, a report published on the Washington Post's website quoted U.S. officials and Syrian figures as saying on Wednesday.

The shipments of weapons were delivered to Syrian rebels together with separate deliveries by the State Department of vehicles and other gear, the report said.

The arms shipments are limited to light weapons and other munitions that can be tracked, and the U.S. hopes that they "will boost the profile and prowess of rebel fighters in a conflict that started about 2 1/2 years ago."

New types of nonlethal gear, including vehicles, sophisticated communications equipment and advanced combat medical kits, are also being shipped to the rebels, at a time when the Obama administration is threatening to attack Syrian government for its alleged chemical attack on Aug. 21, that the U.S. claims killed more than 1,400 people near the capital of Damascus.

The latest U.S. aid is aimed at supporting rebel fighters under the command of Salim Idriss, head of the Supreme Military Council, a faction of the disjointed armed opposition, the report said.

The Obama administration pledged in April to provide arms to Syrian rebels, but such efforts have lagged due to fears that these weapons could fall into hands of the extremist militants fighting the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

The CIA shipments of arms flow through a network of clandestine bases in Turkey and Jordan, the report said.

A Syrian opposition official was quoted as saying that the U.S. remains reluctant to provide the rebels what they most desire: antitank and antiaircraft weapons.

AIPAC MAKES BIG PUSH ON SYRIA MILITARY ACTION

JTA, September 11, 2013

Any reluctance Jewish groups initially had has evaporated after White House advisers consulted with Jewish leaders on the legislation proposal.

Pro-Israel officials rolled their eyes this week in response to the opposing spins about their support for U.S. President Barack Obama's drive to punish Syrian President Bashar Assad for his purported use of chemical weapons against his own people.

Some suggested that once again, the tail was wagging the dog and Israel was leading the United States into another Middle East war. Others charged that the president's arm-twisting was forcing the pro-Israel community to take sides in a congressional debate it would rather avoid.

Whatever the truth, Obama's concerns about letting the alleged August 21 chemical weapons attack go unpunished dovetailed with broader pro-Israel concerns about maintaining U.S. credibility in the region and the dangers of unconventional weapons.

"A lot of folks are watching, friends and foes," said David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee. "If we blink, if we flinch, foes will draw their own lessons and the world will become a more dangerous place."

Jewish groups were hesitant initially to support Obama's push to strike following an attack that is said to have killed more than 1,400 Syrian civilians, including several hundred children. But the reluctance all but evaporated after top Obama advisors outlined the administration's proposed legislation in a conference call last week with Jewish leaders.

The next day, September 3, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee mobilized its grassroots to call members of Congress. On Tuesday, 250 of its top members held one-on-one meetings with lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

Despite the forcefulness of AIPAC's push and the lobby's vaunted clout on Capitol Hill, Obama faces an uphill battle in gaining support from Congress for a strike. In the U.S. House of Representatives, sentiment leans against authorizing a strike. The Senate appears to be split evenly.

The nod from AIPAC and other pro-Israel groups could help shift the balance — in part

because lawmakers tend to defer to groups considered expert on a given topic, but also because of the fundraising prowess associated with the pro-Israel community.

AIPAC's support is joined by other leading American Jewish groups, including the Anti-Defamation League, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. Notably, both partisan Jewish organizations — the Republican Jewish Coalition and the National Jewish Democratic Council — are backing Obama.

Despite the community's caution to have the president lead lest it be blamed for another Middle East war, commentators already are fingering Israel as the catalyst for American military action.

"AIPAC wants this war" was the headline over a string of posts by Andrew Sullivan on his influential Daily Dish blog over the weekend. And the conservative Jewish radio personality Michael Savage blamed Israel outright on his syndicated talk show.

"I'm sick of this slavish worship of Israel," Savage said, according to the conservative website Newsmax. "No, it's America first and Israel's the tail, not the dog. We're the dog, they're the tail. And I'm sick and tired of America being yanked around like we're the tail and they're the dog."

Until recently, Israel had maintained a careful distance from pronouncing on the Syrian civil war, except to note that it would respond to any attack on Israel — by the government or the rebels. But The New York Times reported Tuesday that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was reaching out personally to some congressional leaders at Obama's urging.

Neither the Israeli embassy nor U.S. congressional leaders would confirm the Times report. But in the wake of the chemical attack, Israel has grown more vocal in supporting a response that would degrade Assad's unconventional weapons capability.

"Israel agrees with President Obama that the use of chemical weapons is a 'heinous act' for which the Assad regime must be held accountable and for which there must be 'international consequences,' " Israel's ambassador in Washington, Michael Oren, wrote last week on a Facebook message. "Israel further agrees with the president that the use of chemical weapons promotes the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and encourages 'governments who would choose to build nuclear arms.' "

**US 'BACKED PLAN TO LAUNCH CHEMICAL WEAPON ATTACK
ON SYRIA, BLAME IT ON ASSAD GOVERNMENT': REPORT**

(Please note the dating of this article! January, i.e., five months before the sarin gas was used.

London, Jan 30, 2013 (ANI): The Obama administration gave green signal to a chemical weapons attack plan in Syria that could be blamed on President Bashar al Assad's regime and in turn, spur international military action in the devastated country, leaked documents have shown.

A new report, that contains an email exchange between two senior officials at British-based contractor Britam Defence, showed a scheme 'approved by Washington'.

As per the scheme 'Qatar would fund rebel forces in Syria to use chemical weapons,' the Daily Mail reports.

Barack Obama made it clear to Syrian president Bashar al-Assad last month that the U.S. would not tolerate Syria using chemical weapons against its own people.

According to Infowars.com, the December 25 email was sent from Britam's Business Development Director David Goulding to company founder Philip Doughty. The emails were released by a Malaysian hacker who also obtained senior executives resumes and copies of passports via an unprotected company server, according to Cyber War News. According to the paper, the U.S. State Department has declined to comment on the matter.

LEAD-UP TO THE SARIN GASSING

Secretary of State Kerry had meetings with more than two dozen military specialists on 5/13/13. The Washington Post is reporting that Kerry believes supplying the rebels with weapons might be too little and too late to actually flip the balance on the Syrian ground and this calls "for a military strike to paralyze Al-Assad's military capacities." A Pentagon source reported that the USA, France, and Britain are considering a decisive decision to reverse the current Assad momentum and quickly construct one in favor of the rebels" within a time period not exceeding the end of this summer.

Shortly after the meetings began, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia quickly returned to Saudi

Arabia from his palace at Casa Blanca, Morocco after receiving a call from his intelligence chief, Prince Bandar Bin Sultan. Bander reportedly had a representative at the White House during the meetings with President Obama's team. King Abdullah was reportedly advised by Kerry to be prepared for a rapid expansion of the growing regional conflict.

What happens between now and the end of summer is likely to be catastrophic for the Syrian public and perhaps Lebanon. The "chemical weapons-red line" is not taken seriously on Capitol Hill for the reason that the same "inclusive evidence" of months ago is the same that is suddenly being cited to justify what may become essentially an all-out war against the Syrian government and anyone who gets in the way. Hand wringing over the loss of 125 lives due to chemical weapons, whoever did use them, pales in comparison to the more 50,000 additional lives that will be lost in the coming months, a figure that Pentagon planners and the White House have "budgeted" as the price of toppling the Assad government.

(Franklin Lamb a former Assistant Counsel of the US House Judiciary Committee and Professor of International Law at Northwestern College of Law, Portland, Oregon.)

U.N. HAS TESTIMONY THAT SYRIAN REBELS USED SARIN GAS

Reuters May 5, 2013

U.N. human rights investigators have gathered testimony from casualties of Syria's civil war and medical staff indicating that rebel forces have used the nerve agent sarin, one of the lead investigators said on Sunday.

The United Nations independent commission of inquiry on Syria has not yet seen evidence of government forces having used chemical weapons, which are banned under international law, said commission member Carla Del Ponte.

"Our investigators have been in neighboring countries interviewing victims, doctors and field hospitals and, according to their report of last week which I have seen, there are strong, concrete suspicions but not yet incontrovertible proof of the use of sarin gas, from the way the victims were treated," Del Ponte said in an interview with Swiss-Italian television.

"This was use on the part of the opposition, the rebels, not by the government authorities," she added, speaking in Italian.

Del Ponte, a former Swiss attorney-general who also served as prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, gave no details as to when or where sarin may have been used.

The Geneva-based inquiry into war crimes and other human rights violations is separate from an investigation of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria instigated by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, which has since stalled.

President Bashar al-Assad's government and the rebels accuse each another of carrying out three chemical weapon attacks, one near Aleppo and another near Damascus, both in March, and another in Homs in December. The civil war began with anti-government protests in March 2011. The conflict has now claimed an estimated 70,000 lives and forced 1.2 million Syrian refugees to flee.

Based on CIA and media reports, the United States has said it has "varying degrees of confidence" that sarin has been used by Syria's government on its people. However, this is the first time an independent UN commission has confirmed the use of chemical weapons by any party in the Syrian civil war, confirming that Syrian rebels were guilty of the crime.

President Barack Obama last year declared that the use or deployment of chemical weapons by Assad would cross a "red line".

(Reporting by Stephanie Nebehay; Editing by Tom Pfeiffer)

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**SYRIAN CHEMICAL ATTACK:
MORE EVIDENCE ONLY LEADS TO MORE QUESTIONS**

By Yossef Bodansky

Global Research, September 13, 2013

The paucity of revealed facts highlights the reality that little is really known about the actual attack. There is 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/Médecins 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.

It is still not clear what type of agent killed the victims.

To-date, the US position in documents submitted to Congress is that the victims died as a result of “nerve agent exposure”. Orally, however, Secretary Kerry claimed the US has 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 Technology Laboratory. Soil and cloth samples “tested positive for the nerve gas sarin”. The sarin in the cloth was in liquid form that 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 emergency authorities back on March 20, 1995. The Tokyo subway attack was committed with liquified “kitchen sarin”. The know how 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 2001/2.

As well, it is not yet clear what weapons were used to disperse the chemical agent. The specifics of the weapon will provide the crucial evidence whether this was a military type agent of the kind available in the Syrian arsenal, or improvised, kitchen-style agent of the type known to be within the technical capabilities of the jihadist opposition.

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 have a 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 that 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 a water cooler's huge 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 Liwaa 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 is the largest military operation of the Syrian Army in the Damascus region since the beginning of the conflict. The jihadists also amassed a huge force of over 25,000 fighters for their Front from 13 armed kitaeb [battalion-groupings].

The main units belonged to Jabhat al-Nusra and Liwaa al-Islam. The other kitaeb were Harun al-Rashid, Syouf al-Haqq, al-Mohajereen, al-Ansar, Abu Zhar al-Ghaffari, Issa Bin Mariam, Sultan Mohammad 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 from where they could launch car-bombs and raids. The Jobar 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 Liwaa 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 Liwaa al-Islam forces arrayed in Jobar included "the so-called 'Chemical Weapons Front' led by Zahran Alloush

[the supreme leader of Liwaa 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 Liwaa 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 Liwaa 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 Liwaa al-Islam as a major jihadist force.

On July 18, 2012, Liwaa 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 Liwaa Jaish al-Muslimeen to be

defeated and mauled.

Significantly, in late August 2013, the opposition insisted on having Zahran Alloush and Liwaa 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 Liwaa al-Baraa from Zamalka. Thus, the international experts' team operated while in effective custody of those jihadists most likely responsible for the chemical attack.

According to several jihadist commanders, "Zahran Alloush receives his orders directly from the Saudi Intelligence Chief Prince Bandar bin Sultan" and Liwaa al-Islam is Saudi Arabia's private army in Syria.

The Bandar aspect is important to understanding strategic-political aspects of the chemical strike. No independent evidence ties Bandar to the actual chemical attack.

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 jihadist commanders and both Saudi intelligence and Bandar himself. However, Bandar's threats in the meeting with Russian 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 jihadist 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 jihadist 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 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 has 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 don'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, 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 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 is 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 there was no change to Assad’s “long-standing steadfast policy of not using these [chemical] weapons”.

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 environment. Syrian commando was supplied with, and trained on, these systems starting the late-1970s when preparing to fight the jihadist insurrection 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 that will 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 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 invade and get involved directly in the fighting, to secure the strategic weapon arsenals (which will take 75,000-100,000 troops by the Pentagon's latest estimates), and to overthrow Assad and empower what Bandar calls "moderate" Islamists. (Yossef Bodansky, Senior Editor, GIS/Defense & Foreign Affairs)

Below, Senator John McCain posing with terrorist rebel leader Salam Idris and other Al Qada terrorists in Bab al Salaam, in Syria, May 28, 2013.



AL QAEDA'S STRENGTH WITH SYRIAN REBELS NOW BEING DOWNPLAYED

Guy Taylor, Washington Times September 9, 2013

The Obama administration has started to rebrand Syria's rebels by de-emphasizing the number of al Qaeda fighters among them — a move critics say is based on questionable intelligence design-ed to downplay the risks associated with a U.S. military strike on the regime of President Bashar Assad.

After two years of the Obama administration arguing that the Syrian rebellion was rife with fight-ers linked to al Qaeda, Secretary of State John F. Kerry said last week that Islamic extremists are marginal players in Syria's civil war and are unlikely to profit much from a U.S. bombing campaign.

His new characterization of the opposition has drawn scrutiny — in large part because of the way Mr. Kerry backed it up. Rather than cite official U.S. intelligence assessments, he point-ed to an Aug. 30 opinion article penned for The Wall Street Journal by a 26-year-old analyst with ties to a group that lobbies in Washington on behalf of the Syrian rebels.

In hearings before Congress last week, Mr. Kerry said he generally agreed with the assess-ment, written by Elizabeth O'Bagy, who works at the Institute for the Study of War in Washington.

But that view was challenged by Rep. Michael T. McCaul, Texas Republican, who said the classified briefings he receives as chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security indicated that “the majority now of these rebel forces — and I say majority now — are radical Islamists pouring in from all over the world to come to Syria for the fight.”

Who the rebels are matters. Some lawmakers have pushed for months for the U.S. to take a more active role in arming them in their struggle to unseat Mr. Assad, while others say that could lead to American hardware in the hands of extremists.

More recently, opponents of strikes in Syria have said a U.S. attack could end up benefiting the radical elements of the rebellion.

After the hearings, questions swirled through Washington’s foreign policy community about why Mr. Kerry had been so quick to defend his argument by citing the work of a nongovernmental researcher — rather than an official assessment produced by the U.S. intelligence community.

The State Department’s office of public affairs did not respond to a request by The Washington Times for comment.

Ms. O’Bagy’s work was first raised in a Senate hearing last week by Sen. John McCain, an Arizona Republican who has been pushing for broader U.S. aid to the Syrian rebels, and who asked Mr. Kerry whether he agreed with Ms. O’Bagy’s assessment.

In an interview with The Times on Monday night, Ms. O’Bagy said she was as befuddled as anyone else by attention given to her work by Mr. Kerry. “I myself have asked why he would quote me and not quote intelligence sources,” she said.

She said she has never met Mr. Kerry but has met Mr. McCain. As part of her work with the Syrian Emergency Task Force, she said, she helped arrange a trip that the senator made to Syria in May.

Some analysts speculated that Mr. McCain and Mr. Kerry may have sought to draw attention to Ms. O’Bagy’s work because the official intelligence assessment on Syria’s opposition is classified and because her article offered a chance to point to open-sourced intelligence that fit with their argument.

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**WHO REFUSES TO PUBLISH REPORT ON CANCERS AND BIRTH DEFECTS
IN IRAQ CAUSED BY DEPLETED URANIUM AMMUNITION**

Denis Halliday

Global Research, September 13, 2013

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has categorically refused in defiance of its own mandate to share evidence uncovered in Iraq that US military use of Depleted Uranium and other weapons have not only killed many civilians, but continue to result in the birth of deformed babies.

This issue was first brought to light in 2004 in a WHO expert report “on the long-term health of Iraq’s civilian population resulting from depleted uranium (DU) weapons”. This earlier report was “held secret”, namely suppressed by the WHO:

The study by three leading radiation scientists cautioned that children and adults could contract cancer after breathing in dust containing DU, which is radioactive and chemically toxic. But it was blocked from publication by the World Health Organization (WHO), which employed the main author, Dr Keith Baverstock, as a senior radiation advisor. He alleges that it was deliberately suppressed, though this is denied by WHO. (See Rob Edwards, WHO ‘Suppressed’ Scientific Study Into Depleted Uranium Cancer Fears in Iraq, The Sunday Herald, February 24, 2004)

Almost nine years later, a joint WHO- Iraqi Ministry of Health Report on cancers and birth defect in Iraq was to be released in November 2012. “It has been delayed repeatedly and now has no release date whatsoever.”

To this date the WHO study remains “classified”.

According to *Hans von Sponeck*, former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations,

“The US government sought to prevent the WHO from surveying areas in southern Iraq where depleted uranium had been used and caused serious health and environmental dangers.” (quoted in Mozhgan Savabieasfahani Rise of Cancers and Birth Defects in Iraq: World Health Organization Refuses to Release Data, Global Research, July 31, 2013)

This tragedy in Iraq reminds one of US Chemical Weapons used in Vietnam. And that the US has failed to acknowledge or pay compensation or provide medical assistance to thousands of deformed children born and still being born due to American military use of Agent Orange throughout the country.

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**FROM BEHIND-THE-SCENES HENRY KISSINGER HAS
BEEN DICTATING U.S. POLICY SINCE THE 1960'S**



**"Military men are just
dumb stupid animals to
be used as pawns in
foreign policy."**

Henry Kissinger





HENRY KISSINGER WITH HIS "SHVARTZE"



**KISSINGER ADVISES JOHN KERRY ON DEALING WITH RUSSIA AHEAD
OF CRUNCH TALKS OVER SYRIA WITH PUTIN'S FOREIGN MINISTER**

Daily Mail, September 11, 2013

Secretary of State John Kerry will host Nixon-era Secretary of State Henry Kissinger for a meeting Wednesday, just one day before he is due to lock horns with the Russian foreign minister over the Syria crisis.

'First of all, Syria is not a historic state,' Kissinger recalled during a summer gathering this year at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan.

'It was created in its present shape in 1920, and it was given that shape in order to facilitate the control of the country by France.'

He described the armed conflict there as 'a civil war between sectarian groups.'

Syria, Kissinger cautioned, is 'divided into many ethnic groups, a multiplicity of ethnic

groups, and that means that an election doesn't give you the same results as in the United States because every ethnic group votes for its own people. ... Moreover, these ethnic groups are very antagonistic to each other. You have Kurds, Druzes, Alawites, Sunnis and 10 to 12 Christian ethnic groups.'

The idea of cooperation in a coalition government, Kissinger said, is 'inconceivable,' a Financial Post columnist wrote in August.

Kissinger, best known as the 1970s diplomat who crafted the U.S.-Soviet détente and helped open China to the West, suggested during the summer that Syria should be broken up into separate nations for its varied religious and ethnic groups.

He has generally been supportive, however, of military strikes against the Bashar al-Assad regime, warning that doing nothing would be 'catastrophic.'

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RETIRED CIA ANALYST:

U.S.'S EVIDENCE ON SYRIA CHEMICAL ATTACK FABRICATED

September 11, 2013

Elements within the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) have fabricated intelligence to implicate the Syrian government in the recent chemical attack in Syria and cater for Washington's case for launching strikes on the Middle-Eastern country, said a retired CIA analyst.

Ray McGovern made the remarks in an interview with Russia Today (RT) channel on Monday amid the US rhetoric of war against Syria.

The US has been intensively campaigning for strikes on Syria since August 21, when the militants operating inside the Arab country and its foreign-backed opposition claimed that over a thousand people had been killed in a government chemical attack on suburban Damascus.

The Syrian government categorically rejected the accusation.

The US has all along the way been insisting that it has strong “evidence” against the Syrian government while refusing repeated calls to release it publicly.

“The media is drumbeating for the war (on Syria) just as before Iraq,” McGovern said. “And they don’t want to hear that the evidence is very very flimsy. They don’t want to hear that people within the CIA – senior people, with great access to this information – assure us, the veterans, that there’s no conclusive evidence that Assad ordered those chemical incidents on August 21.”

McGovern was among the veteran intelligence professionals who recently signed a letter to US President Barack Obama, warning that Damascus was not behind the August 21 chemical attack in the Muslim country and that CIA Director John Brennan “is perpetrating a pre-Iraq-War-type fraud on members of Congress, the media, and the public.”

The former CIA analyst stressed that only the Israeli regime would benefit from the crisis in Syria, as the unrest would make the Tel Aviv regime feel that “the Sunnis and the Shiites aren’t going to be turning their swords and their guns on Israel. It’s that simple.”

“So, what we have here is a situation where Israel and the tough guys – and tough gals now – in the White House, advising Obama, say, ‘you’ve got to do something’,” he added, in an apparent reference to US National Security Advisor Susan Rice and US envoy to the UN Samantha Power, who have been heavily involved in the US campaign for strikes on Syria.

Obama “is being given cooked-up intelligence because John Brennan, the head of the CIA, and James Clapper, the confessed perjurer, have thought it in their best interests to cater to the wishes of the White House, which have been very clear: ‘this time, we want to strike Syria,’” McGovern concluded.

The US president, who has faced very weak support for his war plans, said on August 31 that his administration would first seek authorization from an already skeptical Congress.

Reports indicate a majority of Congress members are either against the planned strikes on Syria or are yet undecided. The mood in the Congress seems to mirror that of the general American public, which, polls show, is largely opposed to any US strikes on Syria.

Meanwhile, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Al-Mualem said on Monday, September 9, that his country “welcomes” a Russian proposal to put its chemical weapons under international

control. The Russian proposal was prompted by an apparently off-the-cuff comment by US Secretary of State John Kerry.

Following the new twist in the events, Obama suggested that the planned US strikes on Syria could be averted if the Syrian “gesture” is “real.” In televised comments, parts of a round of TV interviews meant to garner support for his war plans, Obama said it takes time “to tell whether this offer will succeed.” The US president has, therefore, asked the Congress to postpone a vote on his administration’s plan for strikes on Syria.

Obama, however, has said that the threat of American force would remain.

The UN, Iran, Russia, and China have been voicing strong opposition to the US plan for war.

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SYRIA CHEMICAL ATTACK EVIDENCE LEAVES DOUBTS

ZEINA KARAM and KIMBERLY DOZIER

Associated Press, September 8, 2013

The early morning assault in a rebel-held Damascus suburb known as Ghouta was said to be the deadliest chemical weapons attack in Syria's 2 1/2-year civil war. Survivors' accounts, photographs of many of the dead wrapped peacefully in white sheets and dozens of videos showing victims in spasms and gasping for breath shocked the world and moved President Barack Obama to call for action because the use of chemical weapons crossed the red line he had drawn a year earlier.

Yet one week after Secretary of State John Kerry outlined the case against Assad, Americans – at least those without access to classified reports – haven't seen a shred of his proof.

There is open-source evidence that provides clues about the attack, including videos of fragments from the rockets that analysts believe were likely used. U.S. officials on Saturday released a compilation of videos showing victims, including children, exhibiting what appear to be symptoms of nerve gas poisoning. Some experts think the size of the strike, and the amount of toxic chemicals that appear to have been delivered, make it doubtful that the rebels could have carried it out.

What's missing from the public record is direct proof, rather than circumstantial evidence, tying this to the regime.

The Obama administration, searching for support from a divided Congress and skeptical world leaders, says its own assessment is based mainly on satellite and signals intelligence, including intercepted communications and satellite images indicating that in the three days prior to the attack that the regime was preparing to use poisonous gas.

But multiple requests to view that satellite imagery have been denied, though the administration produced copious amounts of satellite imagery earlier in the war to show the results of the Syrian regime's military onslaught. When asked Friday whether such imagery would be made available showing the Aug. 21 incident, a spokesman referred The Associated Press to a map produced by the White House last week that shows what officials say are the unconfirmed areas that were attacked.

The Obama administration maintains it intercepted communications from a senior Syrian official on the use of chemical weapons, but requests to see that transcript have been denied. So has a request by the AP to see a transcript of communications allegedly ordering Syrian military personnel to prepare for a chemical weapons attack by readying gas masks.

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**SYRIAN CHILDREN KIDNAPPED BY REBELS IDENTIFIED
AS GAS VICTIMS BY OBAMA ADMINISTRATION**

By Susan Duclos — Before It's New Sept 8, 2013

The horrifying pictures of dead children being used by the Obama administration to justify an attack on Syria, with the claim that the Assad regime carried out the chemical attacks that killed those children, while emotionally heartbreaking, do not tell the story of those children and do not tell you the main point the Obama administration is trying to coverup.

Those children were kidnapped over a week earlier, before they were slaughtered..... by the Obama backed Syrian rebels.

August 11, 2013 a report discussed the rebels attacking the Latakia village and Sheikh Mohammed Reda Hatem, an Alawite religious leader in Latakia said "Until now 150 Alawites from the villages have been kidnapped. There are women and children among

them. We have lost all contact with them.”

According to Voltaire.net some of those children were found less than two weeks later, in Ghouta, photos below:



The wide distribution of satellite channel images of victims allowed Alawite families near Latakia to recognize their children who had been abducted two weeks prior by the “rebels.” This identification was long in coming because there are few survivors of the massacre by the allies of the United States, the United Kingdom and France in loyalist villages where more than a thousand bodies of civilians were discovered in mass graves.



The children do not correspond to a sample of the population: they are all almost of the same age and have light hair. They are not accompanied by their grieving families.

They are in fact children who were abducted by jihadists two weeks before in Alawite villages in the surroundings of Latakia, 200km away from Ghouta.

Barack Obama's narrative is unraveling as the truth of who murdered these children is being exposed.

The Obama backed Syrian rebels are slaughtering these children, pretending it was Assad that did it, so Obama can claim justification in attacking the Assad regime.

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**TOP OBAMA AIDE SAYS
IT'S 'COMMON SENSE' ASSAD USED CHEMICAL WEAPONS**

The Associated Press

Published Sunday, Sep. 08 2013, 9:36 AM EDT

White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough asserted that a “common-sense test” rather than “irrefutable, beyond-a-reasonable-doubt evidence” makes the Syrian government responsible for a chemical weapons attack that Obama says demands a U.S. military response.

McDonough acknowledged the risks that military action could drag the U.S. into the middle of a brutal civil war and endanger allies such as Israel with a retaliatory attack.

The U.S. is “planning for every contingency in that regard and we’ll be ready for that,” he told CNN’s “State of the Union.”

McDonough was asked whether the president would reveal a direct connection between Assad and the attack.

“The materiel was used in the eastern suburbs of Damascus that have been controlled by the opposition for some time,” McDonough said. “It was delivered by rockets – rockets which we know the Assad regime has and we have no indication that the opposition has.”

McDonough also cited a DVD compilation, released Saturday by a U.S official, of videos showing attack victims. The DVD was shown to senators during a classified briefing on Thursday.

“We’ve seen the video proof of the outcome of those attacks. All of that leads to a quite strong common-sense test irrespective of the intelligence that suggests that the regime carried this out. Now do we have a picture or do we have irrefutable beyond-a-reasonable-doubt evidence? This is not a court of law and intelligence does not work that way. So what we do know and what we know the common-sense test says is he is responsible for this. He should be held to account.”

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AL-QAEDA-LINKED REBELS TAKE SYRIAN CHRISTIAN VILLAGE

CBSNews September 8, 2013

Rebels including al-Qaeda-linked fighters gained control of a Christian village northeast of the capital Damascus, Syrian activists said Sunday.

Maaloula, a scenic mountain community, is known for being one of the few places in the world where residents still speak the ancient Middle Eastern language of Aramaic.

The rebel advance into the area this week was spearheaded by the Jabhat al-Nusra, or Nusra Front, exacerbating fears among Syrians and religious minorities about the role played by Islamic extremists within the rebel ranks.

It was not immediately clear why the army couldn't sufficiently reinforce its troops to prevent the rebel advance in the area only 26 miles from Damascus. Some activists say that Assad's forces are stretched thin, fighting in other areas in the north and south of the country.

Rami Abdurrahman of the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the Nusra Front backed by another group, the Qalamon Liberation Front, moved into the village after heavy clashes with the army late Saturday.

"The army pulled back to the outskirts of the village and both (rebel groups) are in total control of Maaloula now," he told The Associated Press in a telephone interview. He said pro-government fighters remain inside the village, in hiding. Initially, troops loyal to President Bashar Assad moved into Maaloula early Saturday, he said, "but they left when rebels started pouring into the village." Now, Abdurrahman said, the army is surrounding the village and controlling its entrances and exits.

A Maaloula resident said the rebels, many of them sporting beards and shouting Allahu Akbar, or God is great, attacked Christian homes and churches shortly after moving into the village overnight. "They shot and killed people. I heard gunshots and then I saw three bodies lying in the middle of a street in the old quarters of the village," said the resident, reached by telephone from neighboring Jordan. "So many people fled the village for safety." Now, Maaloula "is a ghost town. Where is President Obama to see what befallen on us?" asked the man, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal by the rebels.

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PBS September 5, 2013

JEFFREY BROWN: What about the prestige, the credibility of the United States and of the president himself? Do you worry about that?

ALAN GRAYSON: We don't -- no, we don't earn credibility by doing things that are stupid

and counterproductive. We have to get over that whole idea. And if it were a question of our credibility, then, in fact, I think our credibility is stronger by making wise choices here. And I'll tell you this. We cannot go to war for the sake of anybody's, how shall I say this, credibility.

JEFFREY BROWN: But this is your -- many people in your own -- of course, this is a president in your own party. He's talked about -- he said: "My credibility is not on the line. The international community's credibility is on the line." Is he wrong about that?

ALAN GRAYSON: Yes. The international community has spoken. We are the only ones who are contemplating anything like this.

(Alan Grayson, D. Representative from Florida. Jeffrey Brown, moderator of the News Hour.)

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September 6, 2013

Syrian rebels have withdrawn after briefly entering an ancient Christian town north of Damascus, the main opposition alliance has said.

Among the rebels who clashed with soldiers in Maaloula and the local Popular Committee, set up to defend the town, on Thursday were members of the al-Nusra Front, a group allied to al-Qaeda, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The UK-based activist group said al-Nusra fighters seized a military checkpoint outside Maaloula, about 55km (34 miles) north of Damascus, after a suicide car bomb attack.

The fighting highlighted the delicate position of Syria's Christian minority. When the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad erupted in March 2011, many Christians were cautious and tried to avoid taking sides. However, as the crackdown by security forces intensified and opposition supporters took up arms, they were gradually drawn into the conflict.

Many fear that if the secular government is overthrown they will be targeted by Sunni jihadist rebels calling for the establishment of an Islamic state and that Christian communities will be destroyed, as many were in Iraq after the US-led invasion in 2003.

Most residents fled when the fighting erupted. One woman said the rebels fired shells and anti-aircraft guns, and that some rounds had hit the centre of the town.

Maaloula is one of the earliest centres of Christianity in the world



Maaloula has several churches and important monasteries, including Deir Mar Takla, which is visited by many Christians and Muslim pilgrims.

Inscriptions found in some of the caves in the mountainside on which the town sits confirm it as one of the earliest centres of Christianity in the world, and some residents can still speak Aramaic, the language of Jesus.

Later on Thursday, government warplanes launched three air strikes on the checkpoint held by the rebels. Syria's Sana state news agency meanwhile reported that an army unit "eliminated members of a terrorist group belonging to the al-Nusra Front" north-east of Maaloula and "destroyed the tools they use in their crimes".

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A former resident of Maaloula, an historic Christian town to the north of Damascus, has told the BBC her family was forced to leave their home after it was captured by rebels at the weekend. Antoinette Nassrallah said she didn't know if she would ever return after rebels "stole everything". She said the United States should stop sending weaponry to the rebels, and that any military action against Syria would be based on a "big lie".

Ruth Sherlock, Beirut and Magdy Samaan
7:46PM BST September, 5, 2013

Fighting raged through the picturesque mountain village of Maaloula, near Damascus, on Thursday, as the regime launched a counter-attack against the rebels.

"They entered the main square and smashed a statue of the Virgin Mary," said one resident of the area, speaking by phone and too frightened to give his name. "They shelled us from the nearby mountain. Two shells hit the St Thecla convent."

Maaloula, tucked into the honey-coloured cliffs of a mountain range north of Damascus and on a "tentative" list of applicants for Unesco world heritage status, is associated with the earliest days of Christianity.

St Thecla, who is supposedly buried in the convent, was a follower of St Paul who fled to the village in Syria to avoid marriage, having taken an oath of chastity. It is said that the cleft of rock in which the convent is placed opened up to allow her to escape her pursuers.

The inhabitants are mostly Melkite Greek Catholic and Orthodox Christians, but have historically lived peacefully alongside a Sunni Muslim minority. It is one of only three places in the world where Western Aramaic, a dialect of the language spoken by Christ, is still used.

Until recently, the town had managed to remain mostly unaffected by the civil war that has already claimed more than 100,000 lives. A visit by *The Daily Telegraph* last year found it ringed by government checkpoints but suffering from the lack of pilgrims and tourists who are normally vital to its economy.

In the early hours of Wednesday morning, rebel groups, a mix of the extremist Jabhat al-Nusra and the more moderate Free Syrian Army (FSA), attacked with full force.

"First they took a brick factory owned by a Christian guy, who is now missing," said the resident. "Then at around 5.30am, a car bomb detonated at the checkpoint at the entrance to the village. "Some of the rebels entered a home near the checkpoint belonging to Yousef Haddad, a Christian. They tried to force him to convert to Islam."

A nun living in a convent in the village told the Associated press that 27 orphans living in the convent were taken to nearby caves for shelter.

Video footage posted on YouTube showed rebel fighters on a pick up truck with an anti-aircraft gun mounted on the back firing erratically from inside the mountain town.

Christians, who make up approximately 10 per cent of Syria's population, have increasingly become targets in the conflict as sectarian-minded foreign jihadists gain influence in the opposition ranks. Almost a third of the Syriac Christian population has fled the rebel-held northern town of Hassakeh after Christians became targets for kidnappings and assassinations.

Mousab Abu Qatada, a spokesman for the FSA in Damascus and the Damascus suburbs, denied that the attack on Maaloula had been sectarian.

"We are trying to protect the minorities and the holy sites of Syria. We promise to protect it against the criminal regime," he said.

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By Ruth Sherlock, Istanbul
2:50PM BST 02 Aug 2013

Tens of thousands Syriac Christians – members of the oldest Christian community in the world – have fled their ancestral provinces of Deir al-Zour and Hasakah in northeastern Syria, residents have said.

"It breaks my heart to think how our long history is being uprooted," said Ishow Goriye, the head of a Syriac Christian political Hasakah.

Mr Goriye, told The Daily Telegraph how, over the past two years he has watched as Christian families from Hasakah pack their possessions on the rooftops of their vehicles and flee their homes "with little plan to come back".

Conflict in the area, desperate economic conditions, lawlessness, and persecution by rebel groups born from the perception that Christians support the regime, remain the main reasons for why Christian families are fleeing the area.

The growing presence of radical jihadist groups, including al-Qaeda, has also seen Christians targeted.

"It began as kidnaping for money, but then they started telling me I should worship Allah," a male Christian resident of Hasakah who was kidnaped by jihadists said.

"I was with five others. We were tied and blindfolded and pushed down on our knees. One of the kidnappers leant so close to my face I could feel his breath. He hissed: 'Why don't you become a Muslim? Then you can be free'."

Another Christian in Hasakah said he knew of "five forced conversions" in recent weeks.

Mr Goriye's Christian 'Syriac Union' party has long been in opposition to President Bashar al-Assad's regime. While speaking to The Telegraph, its members were loath to criticize the opposition rebels, but many confessed that the situation had become "too bad" not to talk about it.

Hasakah and other towns in northeastern Syria have long been one of the main population centres for Christians, who make up approximately 10 per cent of the country's population. Residents estimate that at least a third of Christians in northeastern Syria have fled, with few expecting to return.

One Hasakah resident who has now escaped the area said: "Rebels said we had to pay money for the revolution. My cousin is a farmer, and wanted to check on his land. I warned him he should take armed security but he refused. A group kidnaped him in the barn of his farm. We had to pay \$60,000 [£52,000] for his release. They are milking the Christians".

Though accused by some opposition groups of supporting Mr Assad, much of Syria's Christian community has avoided "choosing sides" in the war, seeking self-preservation in neutrality.

But the strategy has left Christians defenceless in the face of sectarian attacks and the lawlessness that now define rebel-held areas. Last year, when government forces pulled out Hasakah province, leaving the terrain in the hands of Kurdish groups and Sunni opposition rebel, Christians became an easy target.

A Christian man calling himself Joseph and living in Hasakah said: "The only unprotected group are the Christians. The Arabs had arms coming from Saudi and Qatar, the Kurds had help from Kurdistan. We had no weapons at all."

Local residents said many Christians had tried to join the rebellion against President Assad, but their efforts were marginalized early on by sectarian minded Sunni rebel groups.

Joseph added: "We are not with the regime. Many times the Islamists didn't want us to join them in the demonstrations. We tried to participate but we were not given a role. It felt as though it was a strategy to force Christians out of the revolution".

Bassam Ishak, a Christian member of the main opposition bloc the Syrian National Coalition, who comes from Hasakah, said he and his colleagues had tried "several times" to approach western officials asking for weapons for Christian groups to defend their areas.

"The West wants to arm the seculars or 'West friendly' people, well we, the Syriac Christians those people. We want arms to protect our communities," he said. "We spoke to western diplomats asking for help, and everyone ignored us".

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SYRIAN ORTHODOX BISHOP AND ANOTHER BEHEADED IN SYRIA

U.S. backed, Chechen mercenaries beheaded Syrian Orthodox Archbishop Youhanna Ibrahim along with with another man, Metropolitan Paul Yazigi, June 23rd. Both men had been kidnaped last April.

Last April 15th, Patriarch Gregorios warned: "There is no safe place left in Syria. The whole of Syria has become a battlefield ... Every aspect of democracy, human rights, freedom, secularism and citizenship is lost from view and no-one cares. The future of Christians in Syria is threatened not by Muslims but by... chaos... and the infiltration of uncontrollable fanatical, fundamentalist groups."

Patriarch Gregorios further claimed that the threat to Christianity in Syria had wider implications for the religion's future in the Middle East because the country had for decades provided a refuge for Christians from neighboring Lebanon, Iraq and elsewhere.

His comments echoed those by another Damascus-based prelate, Maronite Archbishop Samir Nassar, who said Christians in Syria had to "choose between two bitter chalices: to die or leave".

As well as Christians, Shia villages are receiving the brunt of a boldly-confident insurgency. This newly-found confidence has resulted in having just recently received confirmation of America's intent to supply them with more weapons. Last week, militants massacred dozens of villagers in the province's town of Hatla. Since then, summary executions and sectarian house-to-house raids have taken place.

Syria's Christian community is one of the oldest in the world, dating back two millennia. The apostle Paul was converted on the road to Damascus, while some Christians from the town of Maaloula can still speak Aramaic, the language of Jesus.

Christians are believed to have constituted about 30% of the Syrian population as recently as the 1920s. Today, they make up about 10% of Syria's 22 million people.

Sunni Muslims meanwhile make up some 70% of the population and about 12% are Alawites, members of a heterodox Shia sect to which President Bashar al-Assad belongs. There are smaller numbers of Druze and other sects. A large proportion of the country's Sunnis tolerated or supported the Assads, whom they saw as guarantors of stability.

The vast majority of Syrian Christians belong to Eastern denominations. The largest and oldest is the Greek Orthodox Church, which has about 503,000 members. The Armenian Apostolic Church has between 112,000 and 160,000, and the Syrian Orthodox Church about 89,000.

Among the Uniate Churches, which are in communion with Rome, the largest is the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, with between 118,000 and 240,000 members. It is followed by the Syriac Maronite Church of Antioch, which has between 28,000 and 60,000, the Armenian Catholic Church, the Syrian Catholic Church and the Chaldean Catholic Church.

The Assyrian Church of the East has about 46,000 followers.

Minority rights

Despite their minority status, Christians have long been among Syria's elite. They have been represented in many of the political groups which have vied for control of the country, including the secular Arab nationalist and socialist movements which eventually came to the fore. When pro-democracy protests erupted in Syria in March 2011, many Christians were cautious and tried to avoid taking sides. However, as the government crackdown intensified

and opposition supporters took up arms, they were gradually drawn into the conflict.

Hundreds of thousands of Christians have been displaced by the fighting or left the country in the past two years. Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch Gregorios III Laham recently said more than 1,000 Christians had been killed, "entire villages... cleared of their Christian inhabitants", and more than 40 churches and Christian centres damaged or destroyed.

This has led some Christians to express support for President Assad, particularly as sectarian violence has increased and jihadist militant groups calling for an Islamic state in Syria have grown in strength. Many fear that if President Assad is overthrown, Christians will be targeted and communities destroyed as many were in Iraq after the US-led invasion in 2003. They have also been concerned by the coming to power of Islamist parties in post-revolutionary Egypt and Tunisia. Some communities are reported to have taken up offers from the government to arm groups of youths, called "popular committees", to defend themselves from rebel attacks.

The Syrian government says that the chaos is being orchestrated from outside the country, and there are reports that a very large number of the militants are foreign nationals.

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June 25, 2013

Former U.S. secretary of state Henry Kissinger says the American media are not telling the truth about the current situation in Syria. "In the American press it's described as a conflict between democracy and a dictator- and the dictator is killing his own people, and we've got to punish him. But that's not what's going on," he said during a speech at the Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan. "It is now a civil war between sectarian groups," Kissinger added. Kissinger's remarks come as the United States has been criticized for fomenting sectarian discord in Syria and the broader Middle East by interfering in the nations' internal affairs and backing up insurgencies. Elsewhere in his remarks Kissinger said "the outcome I would prefer to see" in Syria was a broken-up and balkanized country with "more or less autonomous regions."

That is the Zionist plan for Syria, to shatter it to pieces. As former Israeli Intelligence Chief, Amos Yaldin told the audience at the Israel Policy Forum in February 2013: "And this military [Syrian], which is a huge threat to Israel, is now also weakening and, in a way, disintegrating. We still have risk from Syria – a risk of being an AlQaeda country, a Somalia-type

country — but from military point of view, each one of these are less dangerous than the Syrian regular army.”

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July 11, 2013

A prominent Khazar Turk has called on the administration of President Barack Obama to attack Syrian “airfields, airplanes and massed artillery.”

The influential chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Carl Levin (D-Mich.) who has returned from a fact-finding trip to the Middle East, also expressed support for arming the militant groups fighting against the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

“Increased military pressure on Assad is the only way to achieve a negotiated settlement in Syria, which in turn is needed to restore stability to a region that certainly doesn’t need any more instability,” Levin said Wednesday during a speech at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Levin conceded that the U.S. public opposes an increased involvement in the Syrian conflict and that there is “no consensus” on the issue on Capitol Hill.

Levin and fellow Senator Angus King (I-Maine) spent five days in Jordan and Turkey, talking to government officials as well as U.S. diplomatic and military personnel about the Syrian conflict. They also met with militant leaders including Salim Idriss, the leader of the so-called Free Syrian Army (FSA), and visited refugee camps along the Syrian border.

In a joint statement on Tuesday, Levin and King said the U.S. and its allies should arm and train the militants and consider “options for limited, targeted strikes at airplanes, helicopters, missiles, tanks and artillery.” However they said they were not calling for American troops on the ground in Syria.

The senators noted that “doing nothing may be the worst option of all,” potentially destabilizing U.S. allies in the region, including Turkey and Jordan, and threatening Israeli interests.

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Let us see if we have this understood correctly. Mr. Obama claims that he is fighting terrorism around the world, yet he is arming terrorists in Syria. Mr. Obama says that the US should not put “boots on the ground” but immediately thereafter rushed a 1000 US troops to Jordan, thus putting 2000 boots on the ground. While claiming that he would like to see peace in war-torn Syria, yet he is now sending lethal aid to Islamic extremists.

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Takfiri militants, in an attack near Syria’s northwestern province of Aleppo in March, had been provided chemical arms by two Qatari officers through Turkey.

According to a Saturday report by the Lebanese newspaper *al-Akhbar*, Qatari officers Fahd Saeed al-Hajiri and Faleh Bin Khalid al-Tamimi were behind the transfer of chemical substances to anti-Syria militants through Ankara. The Qatari officers were later killed in a suspicious explosion in Somalia in May, the report said.

On March 19, over two dozen people were killed and many others injured when foreign-backed militants fired missiles containing a chemical substance into the Khan al-Assal region in the northwestern city of Aleppo, Syria’s official news agency SANA reported.

On May 30, Turkish media reported that two kilograms of sarin gas as well as heavy weapons had been discovered during raids on the homes of 12 members of the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Nusra Front in Turkey’s southern city of Adana, located some 150 kilometers (93 miles) from the border with Syria.

The United States has claimed that the Syrian government has used chemical weapons against the militants and thus crossed Washington’s “red line,” while Damascus dismisses the allegations as mere “lies” and “fabrications.”

Most embarrassing is the inability of the US government to present “findings” to the United Nations.

“That ship has sailed,” with the United States long discredited after the barrage of fabricated intelligence presented to the General Assembly by General Colin Powell on February 5, 2003. I recently discussed this with Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, Powell’s Chief of Staff.

In 2006, Col. Wilkerson stated, "My participation in that presentation at the UN constitutes

the lowest point in my professional life. I participated in a hoax on the American people, the international community and the United Nations Security Council."

On May 5, the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria said it found testimony from victims and medical staff that shows militants had used the nerve agent sarin in Syria.

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June 17, 2013

An Israeli regime's coordinator has met Qatari officials in London to discuss arms deliveries to Syrian foreign-backed militants, Iran's Fars News Agency reported.

The report cited unnamed Qatari government security sources as saying that the regime's Coordinator on Syrian Affairs Afif Shavit and Qatari officials agreed during their meeting in London late in May to cooperate to arm the Syrian militants.

"The 4-hour meeting was held in a house in Braum House in London belonging to Khalid a-Abeed, a Qatari citizen residing in Britain, on May 20," FNA quoted the source, who reportedly requested anonymity for fear of his life, as saying.

"During the meeting, it was decided that Israel prepare and supply the weapons needed by the terrorists in Syria and enter negotiations with European arms manufacturing companies on arms purchases and money transfer methods, and the Qatari side cover the funds and needed budget for purchases," the source added.

The European Union failed to extend an arms embargo on Syria back in May, effectively giving the green light to individual governments, including London and Tel Aviv, to send arms to Syrian militants.

The EU also gave the go-ahead to the European banks to help the Syrian militants by opening branches and accounts there.

This comes as, *the Financial Times* revealed back in May that Qatar has funneled billions of dollars to Syrian terrorists over the past two years in an attempt to overthrow the Syrian government.

"Qatar has spent about three billion dollars in the past two years to support the opposition in

Syria, which far exceeds what provided by any other government. However, Saudi Arabia competes now in leading the bodies providing Syrian opposition with weapons," the paper said.

Britain has also been at the heart of efforts to send arms to Syrian militants and was the key force, alongside France, to persuade the EU not to extend its arms embargo on Syrian terrorists.

British Prime Minister David Cameron said on Sunday that it is vital to send arms to foreign-backed militants in Syria.

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Israel's spy agency, Mossad, is recruiting Algerian young men to send them to Syria to help the other foreign-backed terrorists in the fight against the Syrian people and government, an Algerian newspaper revealed on Wednesday.

Informed sources who asked to remain anonymous told the Algerian daily al-Fajr that the activities of Salafi groups in the country are under the supervision of Mossad and these groups coax the Algerian young men into getting involved in what they call as "Jihad in Syria" and includes killing civilians and increasing insecurity in the country.

The sources said that the Salafi groups in Algeria are in direct contact with their religious fellows in Tunisia and also receive different financial and military aid from Qatar.

In relevant remarks earlier this week, a senior Austrian officer disclosed the logistic, military and medical assistance of Israel to the terrorist groups fighting in Syria.

Israel crosses the border with Syria very often and interferes in Syria's border villages at an unimaginable rate and these interferences include assistance and aid (to the rebel and terrorist groups) in various logistic, military and medical grounds," the Austrian officer, who asked to remain anonymous, said in an interview with the Palestinian weekly al-Manar on Monday.

He also said that Israel and the terrorist groups have joint operation rooms in the bordering areas between Syria and the occupied Palestinian territories to coordinate their activities and facilitate assistance to the rebel groups.

The officer who had been deployed in the Golan Heights within the framework of multinational forces in recent months said that Israel also hosts and treats the wounded members of the rebel groups in field hospitals and clinical centers near the bordering areas, specially Zaif hospital in Safad city.

In relevant development, security sources in the Qatari government disclosed on Sunday that Israel has sent its Coordinator on Syrian Affairs Afif Shavit to a meeting with Qatari officials in London late in May to discuss supply of more arms to the rebel groups fighting the Syrian government.

“During the meeting, It was decided that Israel prepare and supply the weapons needed by the terrorists in Syria and enter negotiations with European arms manufacturing companies on arms purchases and money transfer methods, and the Qatari side cover the funds and needed budget for purchases,” added the source.

Fars News Agency — June 19, 2013

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**SYRIA: 3,500 TONS OF WEAPONS ALREADY
SENT TO 'REBELS,' SAYS LORD ASHDOWN**

July 2, 2013

Source: **Telegraph**

“They do not need arms. It is an unchallenged figure that 3,500 tons of arms have been shipped in by way of Croatia with the assistance of the CIA, funded by the Saudis, funded by the Qataris, going almost exclusively to the more jihadist groups,” the former international high representative for Bosnia said in a debate.

“I know where those weapons are coming from. They are the weapons left over from the Bosnian war. They are being shipped out in large measure through Croatian ports and airports and I can tell you they are making vast sums for corrupt forces in the Balkans.” Lord Ashdown described the rebels as “not a fit and proper collection of people for us to be providing arms to”.

Britain and France favour arming the rebels, while in a change of policy Washington

recently announced it would supply direct military aid to opponents of President Bashar al-Assad. Officials have said they would select "moderate rebels" for assistance. Lord Ashdown said he knew of "no occasion" when a route to peace was to provide more weapons.

He said Syria was the "front line in a wider conflict" involving an attempt to build up a radicalised jihadist Sunni population to fight a war against the Shia.

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REPORT: SAUDIS SENT DEATH-ROW INMATES TO FIGHT SYRIA

Michael Winter, USA TODAY 5:53 p.m. EST January 21, 2013

Saudi Arabia has sent death-row inmates from several nations to fight against the Syrian government in exchange for commuting their sentences, the Assyrian International News Agency reports.

Citing what it calls a "top secret memo" in April from the Ministry of Interior, AINA says the Saudi offered 1,239 inmates a pardon and a monthly stipend for their families, which were allowed to stay in the Sunni Arab kingdom. Syrian President Bashar Assad is an Alawite, a minority Shiite sect.

According to an English translation of the memo, besides Saudis, the prisoners included Afghans, Egyptians, Iraqis, Jordanians, Kuwaitis, Pakistanis, Palestinians, Somalis, Sudanese, Syrians and Yemenis. All faced "execution by sword" for murder, rape or drug smuggling.

Russia, which has backed Assad, objected to the bargain and allegedly threatened to bring the issue to the United Nations, said an unidentified former Iraqi member of Parliament who confirmed the memo's authenticity, says AINA, an independent outlet.

"Initially Saudi Arabia denied the existence of this program. But the testimony of the released prisoners forced the Saudi government to admit, in private circles, its existence," AINA writes. "The Saudis agreed to stop their clandestine activities and work towards finding a political solution on condition that knowledge of this program would not be made public."

AINA also published the original Arabic memo.

The report mentions that most of the 23 Iraqi prisoners returned home, as did an unspecified number of Yemenis. But AINA does not indicate the fates of the remaining inmates or how many may have been killed, wounded or captured.

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DISAPPEARING CHRISTIANS OF IRAQ

It's a challenging time for Iraq's Christians. Since the 2003 American invasion, the Christian community has been threatened and persecuted. Everyone is a target, including Father Mazen Ishou Mitoka. His church in the city of Mosul has been bombed three times. He himself was kidnapped and held for nine days. But the real horror took place last February when his parents responded to a knock at their Mosul home.

FATHER MAZEN ISHOU MITOKA: My father opened the door and saw three armed people. They entered the house and my brother tried to resist them but he had no weapons. We don't keep weapons at home.

SEELYE: The intruders asked for an identity card to confirm that the family was Christian. They then shot and killed the priest's father and two brothers. Father Mazin says the killings make no sense to him.

MITOKA: Are they political or sectarian? Is this part of some plan to get rid of the Christians? There is always a question mark. Nobody claims the assassinations.

SEELYE: Iraq's Christians are one of the world's oldest Christian communities. Most belong to the Chaldean Catholic Church. Others are Assyrian, affiliated with the Church of the East, or Syriac Orthodox. While they all speak Arabic, their native tongue is Aramaic, the language of Christ. At the time of Saddam's overthrow, there were estimated to be up to one million Christians in Iraq. Today their numbers have diminished by more than a third as Christians have fled a wave of violence, unleashed by the US invasion.

Siham and Linda Basheer are widows. Their husbands, a father and son, were killed in 2008. The men were shot within two weeks of each other in Mosul by unidentified gunmen. The widows blame the violence on growing Muslim extremism and intolerance, which they say didn't exist before the US invasion.

LINDA BASHEER: During the Muslim holy month of Ramadan we sent food and well wishes to the Muslims. Muslims visited Christians, Christians visited Muslims. We all got

along. But after the collapse of Saddam, everything changed.

SEELYE: In the past, they say, Iraq's Christians were an accepted and integral part of Iraqi society. Their contributions were significant, adds Basile Georges Casmoussa, the Syriac Archbishop of Mosul.

BASILE GEORGES CASMOUSSA: In the 1950s, the dozens of doctors in Mosul were all Christian. Christians opened the first schools, the first publishing house, the first theater, the first hospital.

SEELYE: Hani adds that the disappearance of Iraq's Christians would not be unprecedented. He points to neighboring Turkey, where a once flourishing Christian community is now virtually nonexistent. He says Christians in places like Egypt and Palestine are also leaving due to political pressures.

ANDREWS: If these superpowers will stay ignoring what happening in the Middle East, I think maybe in the next 50 or 70 years the Middle East will be empty from Christianity.

(Religion & Ethics Newsweekly, Nov 24, 2010, Kate Seelye in Iraq)

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IRAQ'S DISAPPEARING CHRISTIANS ARE BUSH AND BLAIR'S LEGACY

The irony of the Iraq invasion is it may have wiped out their faith where other conquests failed

Before Bush senior took on Saddam for the first time in 1991, there were more than a million Christians in Iraq. They made up just under 10% of the population, and were a prosperous and prominent minority, something exemplified by the high profile of Tariq Aziz, Saddam's Christian foreign minister. Educated and middle class, the Christians were concentrated in Mosul, Basra and especially Baghdad, which then had the largest Christian population of any city in the Middle East.

Of the 800,000 Christians still in Iraq when Dubya unleashed the US army on Saddam for the second time, two thirds have fled the country. In 2006, a priest was kidnapped, then found beheaded and dismembered; 15 churches have been bombed and many other priests

killed. Iraqi refugees tell me that Christian women have suffered kidnap and rape, little of which has been reported.

The Christian community in Iraq is one of the oldest in the world: according to tradition it was St Thomas and his cousin Addai who first brought Christianity to Mesopotamia, soon after the crucifixion.

Given the overt Christian faith of the two architects of the invasion, Bush and Tony Blair, there is a tragic irony in the fact that their most lasting contribution to the region may well be to have created the environment that led to the destruction of Christianity in one of its ancient heartlands – something Arab, Mongol and Ottoman conquests all failed to pull off.

(William Dalrymple, The Guardian, Nov. 12, 2010)

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P A L E S T I N I A N C H R I S T I A N S

Although some people think that the term "Palestinian" implies a person is a Muslim, Palestinian Christians also exist and their ancestry in the Holy Land goes back to the earliest days of Christianity. As in the East Mediterranean at large, Christians in Palestine were gradually Arabized during the early centuries following the Muslim occupation of the area in the seventh century. Despite their small proportion of the Arab population, Christians have played a significant role in the Palestinian Arab national movement, society, and culture. More recently, the millennium year and the Pope's visit to the Holy Land focused worldwide attention on this small but significant Christian minority.

Notwithstanding their prominence, the Christians have suffered a serious demographic setback during the past fifty years to the extent that some church leaders have expressed apprehension regarding the very existence of Christian communities in the Holy Land: Is Christian life liable to be reduced to empty church buildings and a congregation-less hierarchy with no flock in the birthplace of Christianity? In reply, we survey the demographic trends, main features, and dilemmas of the Christians in the Holy Land.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the main Christian centers in Palestine were Galilee in the north, most obviously in the vicinity of the Christian town of Nazareth, and the expanding coastal towns of Acre, Haifa, Jaffa, and Gaza. Jerusalem, the capital and the administrative center of mandatory Palestine (1917-48) became the largest center of

Palestinian Christians owing to the relatively high degree of security and opportunities for work that it offered for the middle class, to which a large proportion of the Christians belonged. Bethlehem, on the southern border of the expanded Jerusalem municipal boundaries since 1967, and Ramallah, on Jerusalem's present northern municipal borders, together with their neighboring Christian villages formed traditional Christian enclaves. Christians experienced unprecedented security and prosperity during the 30-year British mandate. The termination of the mandate and the 1948 war caused the exodus of Christians, particularly from the coastal towns and Jerusalem. Just as with their Muslim neighbors, Palestinian Christians were dispersed in the neighboring Arab states and those who remained within the boundaries of mandatory Palestine came under the rule of three political entities: The State of Israel, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and Egypt. Following the 1967 war, Israel gained control of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Since 1994, the PA has gradually assumed charge of the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank.

Ever since the establishment of the Palestinian Arab national movement in the early 1920s, Christians have distinguished themselves in the political-cultural dimensions of the movement. Throughout the British mandate, they were active in the struggle against Zionism, most significantly in presenting the Palestinian national cause to the Western public and governments

The proportion of the Christians in the Arab population in Israel gradually decreased from 21 percent in 1949 to 13 percent in 1990, and to less than 10 percent at the end of 1998. This decline has been due mainly to the higher birthrate of the Muslims and the continuous emigration of the Christians. The case of the town of Nazareth is indicative of the Christian demographic ebb and flow. By the nineteenth century, Nazareth had grown from a small village to the regional capital of Galilee with a Christian majority as a result of the enterprise of the local Muslim ruler and the activity of the Western churches. During the British mandate, it flourished despite migration of Christians to the expanding coastal towns. But the 1948 war caused a drastic change in the town's population. It absorbed many refugees, the majority of whom were Muslim, and the town's boundaries were expanded to include several neighboring villages with majorities of Muslims as well. Hence, by 1961 Nazareth was about to lose its Christian majority.

Under Israeli rule, Jerusalem's Christian population decreased both absolutely and proportionately, . . . The Israeli government has not treated the Christians as a distinct group separate from the Muslims, as it has the Druze. Religious freedom and the autonomy of the Christian communities have been respected; however, Christians as individuals have been

treated by the government as an integral part of the Arab minority.

Israel and the Territories - Disappearance / Disappearing Christians of the Middle East

(Daphne Tsimhoni *Middle East Quarterly* Winter 2001, pp. 31-42)

**TOP TEN REASONS ISRAEL TRIED TO CENSOR BOB SIMON'S
REPORT ON PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS**

Posted on 04/25/2012 by Juan Cole

Israeli Ambassador Michael Oren not only called the head of CBS news in an attempt to quash a report on the displacement of Palestinian Christians by the Israeli Occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, but he briefed Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of the far right wing Likud Party on his attempt.

Here are the top ten reasons Israel's Likud Party would have wanted to censor American television news on this occasion (and of course we don't know all the occasions they have successfully done so):

1. The report told Americans that there *are* Palestinian Christians. Right wing Israelis have attempted to displace, expropriate and erase the Palestinian nation, and to convince Americans that Palestinians don't exist or if they do are enemies of the U.S. When the foe of the US was the Soviet Union, they made the Palestinians Communists. When the foe became al-Qaeda, they made the Palestinians violent fundamentalists. But if some percentage of Palestinians is Christians, then that fact disrupts the propaganda. In fact, millions of Palestinians are descended from the 700,000 or so Palestinians ethnically cleansed by the Israelis from what is now Israel in 1948, of whom about 10 percent were Christian.
2. The report mentioned that some Palestinians are Lutherans, Catholics and Episcopalians, establishing a link of commonality between them and Americans. The Israeli Likud Party wants Americans identifying only with Israelis, not with Palestinians.
3. The report told Americans that Israel is occupying and colonizing Palestinian land. Most Americans think it is the other way around because of the success of Likud disinformation.
4. The report let it slip that Palestinians in the West Bank need a permit to travel to Arab East Jerusalem and are subjected within the West Bank to humiliating check points that turn

a 7 mile journey into an all-day ordeal. This system sounds an awful lot like the old South African Apartheid.

5. The report allowed Palestinians to speak for themselves and to refute Oren's anti-Palestinian talking points. It is a key principle of right wing Israeli propaganda that Palestinians should never be allowed to challenge the Israeli narrative on American television.

6. The report allowed a prominent Palestinian businessman and Coca Cola distributor to say that he knew of no Palestinian Christians who were leaving the West Bank and Jerusalem because of Muslims but that rather they were leaving because of Israeli oppression.

7. It allowed the Palestinians to point out that the West Bank now looks like Swiss cheese, with Israeli colonies grabbing the good land and water, and the stateless Palestinians pushed into the holes.

8. The report described the Palestinian Kairos Document, calling for nonviolent, peaceful struggle by Palestinians against Israeli Occupation and land grabs. Likud propaganda insists in racist fashion that all Palestinians are inherently angry and violent and that their protest against being made stateless and homeless by Israel is irrational.

9. The report quotes an Israeli scholar who puts "Political Judaism" on par with "Political Islam."

It is a key principle of Likud propaganda that no movement in Israel may ever be compared to movements in the Muslim world.

10. The report allows Palestinians to point out that the way the Israelis built the Separation Wall isolated Bethlehem, Jesus's birthplace and a city that still is 18% Christian, had made it "an open-air prison."

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FROM 60 MINUTES:

For Israel, there could be serious economic consequences. According to Israeli government figures, tourism is a multi billion dollar business there. Most tourists are Christian. Many of them are American. That's one reason why Israelis are very sensitive about their image in

the United States. And that could be why Ambassador Oren phoned Jeff Fager, the head of CBS News and executive producer of 60 Minutes, while we were still reporting the story, long before tonight's broadcast. He said he had information our story was quote: "a hatchet job."

Michael Oren: It seemed to me outrageous. Completely incomprehensible that at a time when these communities, Christian communities throughout the Middle East are being oppressed and massacred, when churches are being burnt, when one of the great stories in history is unfolding? I think it's-- I think it's-- I think you got me a little bit mystified.

Bob Simon: And it was a reason to call the president of-- chairman of CBS News?

Michael Oren: Bob, I'm the ambassador of the State of Israel. I do that very, very infrequently as ambassador. It's just-- that's an extraordinary move for me to complain about something. When I heard that you were going to do a story about Christians in the Holy Land and my assum-- and-- and had, I believe, information about the nature of it, and it's been confirmed by this interview today.

Bob Simon: Nothing's been confirmed by the interview, Mr. Ambassador, because you don't know what's going to be put on air.

Michael Oren: Okay. I don't. True.

Bob Simon: Mr. Ambassador, I've been doing this a long time. And I've received lots of reactions from just about everyone I've done stories about. But I've never gotten a reaction before from a story that hasn't been broadcast yet.

Michael Oren: Well, there's a first time for everything, Bob.

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"If you see what's happening in the West Bank you will see it is looking more and more like a piece of Swiss cheese; where Israel gets the cheese: that is the land, the water resources, and the archeological sites, and the Palestinians are pushed in the holes behind the walls." Mitri Raheb, a Palestinian Christian Lutheran minister from Bethlehem, said.

The Israeli Ambassador to the U.S., Michael Oren, admitted that "Christian communities are

living under duress" but argued that the stress placed on Christian communities in the Holy Land was a result of Islamic extremism and not the policies of the Israeli government.

"We regret any inconvenience caused by the security precautions, but it's their inconvenience and our survival," Oren said.

Oren had contacted CBS News prior to its airing of the report to ensure that the network was not airing a "hatchet job" and said that he found it "incomprehensible" that CBS would focus on the plight of Christians in Israel in light of increasing Christian persecution across the region.

However, prominent Israeli journalist Ari Shavit said that it was in fact policies utilized by the Israeli government that have led to the exodus of the Palestinian Christian community.

"Israel is not persecuting Christians as Christians. The Christians in the Holy Land suffer from Israeli policies that are a result of the overall tragic situation. And this, of course, has consequences for everybody," Shavit told the Simon during the segment.

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THE DISAPPEARING MIDDLE EASTERN CHRISTIANS

by Srdja Trifkovic • September 4, 2012

It is not to be doubted that if the Obama Administration is successful in its stated objective of bringing Assad down, the Christians in Syria will follow their Iraqi brethren into exile. The predictable consequences of Assad's fall and the Brotherhood's victory would be the creation of a Shari'a-based Islamic state.

According to political analyst James Jastras, it sometimes appears as if Washington's policy toward the unrest sweeping the Middle East is impacted by a network of Muslim Brotherhood agents working in cohorts with Obama who is only pretending to have strayed from his Islamic birth (as defined by Sharia). If this scenario is even only partly correct, Jastras says, then it would be hard to see how the result would be different from the one we have:

"If the conscious goal of the policy were the final uprooting of Christ's followers from the region of His birth and earthly ministry, it could not have been better crafted. No one can doubt that should the regime of Bashar al-Assad fall, Syria's Christians (primarily Orthodox),

already singled out for attack by the ‘democratic’ opposition, would be subject to a full-scale campaign of elimination that they (unlike the Alawites, who at least can try to defend themselves in mountain areas in which they predominate) are unlikely to survive as a living community. It is thus not too strong to accuse, in so many words, those bipartisan champions of ‘Free Syria’ who urge outside intervention of advocating Christian genocide, whether or not that is their conscious intention.”

That this scenario seems acceptable to the Obama Administration became obvious in October 2011 when Dalia Mogahed, Obama’s adviser on Muslim affairs, blocked a delegation of Middle Eastern Christians led by Lebanon’s Maronite Patriarch Bechara Rai from meeting with Obama and members of his national security team at the White House. Mogahed reportedly cancelled the meeting at the request of the Muslim Brotherhood in her native Egypt. Rai has warned repeatedly that a Brotherhood-led regime would be a disaster for Syria’s Christian minority, but his admonitions are unwelcome in Washington.

Last July, the Department of State vigorously lobbied against bipartisan Congressional legislation to send “protection envoys” to the Middle East to examine the position of the Christian minorities. The State Department called the protection envoy role “unnecessary, duplicative and likely counter-productive.” In the meantime, tens of thousands of Syria’s Christians have already fled rebel-controlled areas as Islamists who dominate in the rebel ranks target them for murder, extortion and kidnapping. As George Ajjan concludes, this gradual downward demographic pressure of recent years will explode with the exodus of Christians from Syria that is occurring and will accelerate without an end to the current armed conflict:

“Should the uprising continue, with the regime losing control of more and more territory to armed rebels and law and order further breaking down, Christians will increasingly become the targets of intimidation tactics, kidnapping, and overt hostility—if not ethnic cleansing from mixed areas.”

At the same time, Administration officials pressed Egyptian generals into gradual surrender to the Muslim Brotherhood’s takeover of the country. The decision to treat the Muslim Brotherhood as a strategic partner has been on the cards at least since February 10 of last year—one day before Hosni Mubarak’s resignation—when President Obama’s Director of National Intelligence James Clapper made an astounding statement. He told the House of Representatives Select Committee on Intelligence that the Brotherhood “is an umbrella term for a variety of movements... a very heterogeneous group, largely secular, which has

eschewed violence and has decried al-Qaida as a perversion of Islam.”

The assertion by a top-ranking member of Obama’s team that the Muslim Brotherhood is “largely secular” defies belief. It came into being in 1928 as an outright reaction against secularism, which the Egyptian elites had largely embraced during the British dominance in the country. To this day the Brotherhood’s simple credo remains the same: “Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. Qur’an is our law. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope.” Contrary to Clapper’s assurances, the Brotherhood is an archetypical Islamic revivalist movement that opposes the ascendancy of secular ideas and advocates a return to integral Islam as a solution to the ills that had befallen Muslim societies. Today it has branches in every traditionally Muslim country and all over the world, including the United States. Its members share the same long-term goal: the establishment of a world-wide Islamic state based on Sharia law. As is to be expected, they believe that the Koran and the Tradition justify violence to overthrow un-Islamic governments, and they look upon America as a sworn enemy.

During the Cold War, Washington routinely pandered to various Islamists as a means of weakening secular Arab nationalist regimes. In the mid 1950s, the Americans even promoted the idea of forming an Islamic bloc—led by Saudi Arabia—to counter the Nasserist movement. That approach may have made some sense during the Cold War, but it certainly makes none today. The strategy of effective support for Islamic ambitions against the Soviets in Afghanistan has helped turn Islamic radicalism into a truly global phenomenon detrimental to U.S. security interests. The ridiculous notion that the Muslim Brotherhood can become America’s user-friendly partner merely proves that the architects of our Middle Eastern policy have learned nothing and forgotten nothing.

Egypt’s dwindling Copts have seen their position deteriorate over the past year from precarious to perilous. Already facing discrimination and harassment from Mubarak’s secular regime, they now see that things could get a lot worse under the Islamists who are now poised to take complete power. Their annus horribilis started on New Year’s Day 2011, when a powerful car bomb targeted a Coptic church in Alexandria, killing 25 parishioners and wounding nearly 100 just as they were finishing midnight liturgy. The next turning point was the Maspero massacre on October 9, 2011, when 27 unarmed Christian protesters were killed and hundreds more injured, not by some shadowy Islamic extremists but by the military. An official commission — established by the Army — has unsurprisingly absolved the Army of all responsibility for the killings.

Egypt shows that the prospect of the end of Christianity in Syria as a direct consequence of American policy is not unique, nor limited to one party or administration. The almost complete Muslim Brotherhood takeover of Egypt already is accompanied by an accelerating Coptic exodus, as church attacks and kidnappings (mainly of girls, who after rape and supposed “conversion” to Islam are denied return to their families).

The process is accelerating. On August 1 Sherif Gadallah, a prominent lawyer from Alexandria, submitted a report to the public prosecutor demanding the exclusion of Copts from the committee in charge of forming Egypt’s constitution. That same week a sectarian crisis escalated in the village of Dahshur, only 25 miles south of Cairo, where hundreds of Muslims torched and looted Coptic businesses and homes. “As 120 families had already fled the village ... the businesses and homes were an easy game for the mob to make a complete clean-up of everything that could be looted,” said Coptic activist Wagih Jacob. “The security forces were at the scene of the crime while it was taking place and did nothing at all.” The Coptic Orthodox Church issued a statement criticizing officials “for not dealing firmly with the events, demanding the speedy arrest of the perpetrators, the provision of security to the village Copts, their return to their homes, and monetary compensation for all those affected.” Its adherents see the Dahshur incident as a continuation of the Mubarak-era policy of collective punishment of Copts. Renowned Egyptian novelist Alaa Al-Aswany said, “What if the Americans acted the same way as the extremists of Dahshur; would you accept the expulsion of Muslims of America in response to Bin Laden's terrorism?”

Egypt’s ongoing transition to what passes for democracy in the Muslim world is going to make matters far worse for the Copts, who are fearful the army and courts will not shield them from ever-greater discrimination and harassment. The Freedom and Justice Party, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Muslim Brotherhood, now controls the country’s parliament, and the president is a Brotherhood disciple. The adherents of political Islam are in charge. Their spiritual leader is Sheikh Ali Gomaa, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, who in a recent video reminded the faithful that Christians are infidels. The Sheikh’s position is in line with orthodox Islamic teaching, which may explain the fact that he is still hailed in the West as a moderate. Five years ago, a U.S. News article described him as “a highly promoted champion of moderate Islam.” As a result, according to an August 14 report in El Fagr, jihadi organizations openly distribute leaflets inciting for the killing of Copts and promising them “a tragic end if they do not return to the truth” (Islam). The letter even names contact points and a location, Sheikh Ahmed Mosque in Kasfrit, where those supportive of such goals should rally after Friday prayers and join forces.

The leader of Egypt's Coptic Orthodox Church on Tuesday (June 18th, 2013) blasted the country's Islamist president over his handling of the recent deadly sectarian violence, including an attack on the main cathedral in Cairo.

The remarks by Pope Tawadros II underscore rising Muslim-Christian tensions in Egypt. They were Tawadros' first direct criticism of President Mohammed Morsi since he was enthroned in November as the spiritual leader of Egypt's Orthodox Christians. They are also likely to fuel the political turmoil roiling the country for the two years since the ouster of autocrat Hosni Mubarak.

Tawadros also warned that the state of Egypt was "collapsing" and described Sunday's attack on the St. Mark Cathedral in central Cairo, which serves as the Coptic papal seat, as "breaching all the red lines."

Tawadros said Morsi had promised him in a telephone conversation to do everything to protect the cathedral, "but in reality he did not."

Asked to explain Morsi's attitude, Tawadros, who spoke in a telephone interview to a political talk show aired on the private ONTV network, said it "comes under the category of negligence and poor assessment of events."

On Sunday, an angry mob of Muslims threw firebombs and rocks at the Coptic cathedral in Cairo, leaving two people dead. One of the two was identified as a Christian.

The attack followed a funeral service for four Christians killed in sectarian clashes in a town north of Cairo early the day before. A fifth person, a Muslim, was also killed. It was the deadliest sectarian violence since Morsi came to office nine months ago as the country's first freely elected president.

Christians make up about 10 percent of Egypt's estimated 90 million people. Copts have complained for decades of discrimination and issues such as the building of houses of worship or inter-religious love stories often ignite Muslim-Christian violence.

But attacks against Christians have increased since Mubarak's 2011 ouster, including more attacks on churches and at times forced evictions of entire Christian communities from small towns and villages.

With Islamists politically empowered since the overthrow of Mubarak's regime, Christians have become increasingly worried about their freedom of worship and belief.

Morsi Meltdown

Morsi, this week, called for a holy war on Islam's Shia sect, which makes up nearly 40% of the Muslim population of the Middle East. Morsi referred to Shia Muslims as "unclean" and called for the extermination of what would constitute the majority of the population of Iraq, Iran, large portions of Kuwait, Azerbaijan, Yemen, Nigeria, Ghana, Lebanon, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and a dozen other nations.

Morsi called for Egyptian "fighters" to begin a war on Syria, Iraq and Iran, a war that coincides with the expansionist goals of "Greater Israel" and the rogue elements of the CIA.

Morsi said Egypt must cut off all diplomatic relations with the Syrian government, ordering the closure of the Syrian embassy in Cairo.

Morsi, who was addressing thousands of his supporters at a rally in Cairo on June 15, also called on Western states to enforce a no-fly zone over Syria.

The United States has recently announced that it will impose a no-fly zone over Syria and the Pentagon is drawing up plans for the move.

Last week, Morsi was also heard to call for military action against Ethiopia over a hydro-electric project he says is intended to divert the Nile River and turn Egypt into a barren wasteland.

Analysts cite Morsi's recent behavior as both "bizarre and unstable," indicating desperation at his inability to cope with domestic problems that seem to be moving inexorably toward a renewal of widespread domestic confrontation against the Cairo government.

Morsi has yet to address his failure to follow up on his promises to support Gaza after Israeli attacks in November 2012. Both Morsi and Turkey's Erdogan have, in actuality, moved closer to Israel and given that nation a free hand in continuing its use of cluster bombs and chemical munitions on Gaza's civilian population.

Army concern about the way President Mohamed Morsi was governing Egypt reached

tipping point when the head of state attended a rally packed with hardline fellow Islamists calling for holy war in Syria, military sources have said.

At the June 15th rally, Sunni Muslim clerics used the word “infidels” to denounce both the Shias fighting to protect Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and the non-Islamists that oppose Mr Morsi at home.

Mr Morsi himself called for foreign intervention in Syria against Mr Assad, leading to a veiled rebuke from the army, which issued an apparently bland but sharp-edged statement the next day stressing that its only role was guarding Egypt’s borders.

“The armed forces were very alarmed by the Syrian conference at a time the state was going through a major political crisis,” said one officer, whose comments reflected remarks made privately by other army staff. He was speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not permitted to talk to the media.

Crippling flaw

The controversy surrounding the Syria conference pointed to a crippling flaw in the Morsi presidency: though the constitution names Mr Morsi as supreme commander of the armed forces, the military remains master of its own destiny and a rival source of authority to the country’s first freely elected head of state.

The army’s dramatic ultimatum demanding Mr Morsi and other politicians settle their differences by tomorrow afternoon caught the presidency completely off guard. Triggered by mass protests against Mr Morsi’s rule, it amounted to a soft coup by a military that has been a major recipient of US aid since the 1970s, when Egypt made peace with neighbouring Israel.

The army has cited the need to avoid bloodshed as its main motivation. It is also worried by other major problems facing Egypt, including an economic crisis that has wiped out more than a tenth of the value of the currency this year, making it harder for the state to import fuel and food.

Speaking on the eve of the protests, the president had dismissed the idea that the army would take control again.

If Mr Morsi was aware of irritation in the army, he chose to ignore it, believing his mandate as Egypt's democratically elected leader gave him licence to make policy the way elected leaders do elsewhere in the world.

For the army, the Syria rally had crossed "a national security red line" by encouraging Egyptians to fight abroad, risking creating a new generation of jihadists, said Yasser El-Shimy, analyst with the International Crisis Group.

At the heart of the military's concern is the history of militant Islam in Egypt, homeland of al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahri. The military source condemned recent remarks made by "retired terrorists" allied to Mr Morsi, who has deepened his ties with the once-armed group al-Gamaa al-Islamiya.

The ouster on Wednesday (July 4rd, 2013) of Egypt's elected Muslim Brotherhood government barely a year after it took office represents a significant setback for the Islamist movements that have proved the biggest beneficiaries so far of the Arab Spring revolts.

From Tunisia to war-torn Syria, anti-Islamist activists have begun expressing unhappiness with the religious parties empowered by freedoms the turmoil unleashed. That the backlash has crescendoed in Egypt — the Arab world's political and cultural trendsetter and the birthplace of the Muslim Brotherhood 80 years ago — is likely to resonate far beyond, perhaps most forcefully in Syria.

"What happens to the Islamists in Egypt will determine their status in the remaining countries of the region," said Jordanian political analyst Labib Kamhawi. "This is making them nervous because they know that if they lose in Egypt, they will end up losing everywhere."

There can be little doubt that the specter of the Arab world's most populous nation rising up in seemingly unprecedented numbers against an Islamist leader has tainted the Brotherhood's long effort to present itself as a viable alternative to the region's mostly repressive regimes, in ways that it may find hard to redress.

"This is one of Islamism's biggest crises in recent memory, indeed in decades," said Shadi Hamid, director of research at the Brookings Doha Center in Qatar.

Molhem al-Drobi, a senior official with the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, acknowledged the anxiety. "This is not what we hoped for," he said.

The Syrian government, which has long sought to portray its repression of the revolt against its rule as a crusade against Islamists, is relishing the Brotherhood's humiliation in Egypt. Assad, in comments to be published in the state-run newspaper al-Thawra on Thursday, declared that "what is happening in Egypt is the fall of so-called political Islam."

Syrian Information Minister Omran al-Zoubi on Wednesday called on Morsi to recognize that "the overwhelming majority of the Egyptian people want him to go," and state television broadcast wall-to-wall live coverage of the crowds gathered in Tahrir Square.

"Will the Brotherhood see the reality of events — and they rarely see any reality other than the visions in their own minds — and step down under the pressure of tens of millions of Egyptians? Or will the country be pushed into a civil war?" asked the announcer who read Wednesday afternoon's news broadcast on state television, ahead of the daily digest of army victories against "terrorists" opposing the government.

Meanwhile, in rebel-held portions of Syria, people are starting to chafe at the behavior of the Islamist groups who gained prominence on the battlefield and are now seeking to impose their authority on the areas they control.

The execution on the streets last month of a 14-year-old boy for making a blasphemous comment and a rule issued this week by the city's self-appointed Sharia court banning women from wearing makeup have stirred anger in the northern city of Aleppo.

Further afield, the recent mass demonstrations in Turkey, hailed as a model for emerging Arab democracies, were sparked by plans to chop down trees in a central Istanbul park but quickly grew into a wider expression of unease with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's authoritarian style and his policies of Islamicization.

In Tunisia, the ruling Ennahda party, a Brotherhood affiliate, has held the middle ground between the radical Salafis who have threatened to use force to impose Islamic law and secularist activists, in another reflection of the splits opening up across the region that could shape a new round of turmoil.

"There is a fundamental divide in the Arab world over big issues such as the role of religion in government ... and the identity of the state," Hamid said. "It is a real, fundamental divide, and there is a lot at stake."

What is most at stake, however, is the Israeli/American policy of Let's you in him fight. The Zionists' wet dream is to foment a war between Sunnis and Shiites. The Pharisees and the Sadducees, that is, the Republicans and the Democrats, vie with each other to bring on the War, using Muslims as their proxies.

What is recognized throughout the Middle East is a carefully organized and orchestrated move toward religious war, siding Wahhabis and Israel, aided by western intelligence agencies and the world oil, and banking cartels, against not just Shia Muslims.

A broader move is afoot to create a cross border monolith, a marriage of al-Qaeda, Wahhabism and Zionism with a new Ottoman Empire as envisioned by Turkey's Erdogan, which will put an end to democratic aspirations on the part of any people's in the Middle East.

From the *Washington Post*, al-Qaeda reveals its move toward building a Jihadist nation with US backing, "Baghdadi insists that a merger he announced in April with Syria's al-Nusra Front, also known as Jabhat al-Nusra, to create a cross-border movement known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant will go on. Al-Nusra, a self-proclaimed al-Qaeda affiliate, has emerged as one of the most effective rebel factions in Syria...

'The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant will continue,' Baghdadi said. 'We will not compromise and we will not give up.'

He urged his followers to rise up against Shiites, Alawites and the "Party of Satan" - a reference to the Iran-backed Lebanese Hezbollah, which has been sending fighters to Syria to fight alongside President Bashar al-Assad's regime. "

The state described by Iraq's al-Qaeda leader, "Baghdadi," would spread and transect Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Iraq and even Georgia and Azerbaijan.

"Liberation" of Iraq from Saddam Hussein's secular dictatorship has devastated that country's Christian community, with many taking refuge in Syria, where they are now again under threat. "At least proponents of Muslim liberation in the Middle East can claim, however implausibly, that the negative impact on local Christians is an unintended and regrettable consequence of a fundamentally humane and progressive program," James Jastras says.

Washington—supposedly the great global opponent of jihad terror—in fact is the consistent supporter of militant Islamization of one country after another, with the predictable result of streams of Christian refugees, burned churches, murdered clergy, and enslaved girls. Given the collusion between our government and media, not one American in ten has a clue what our government is doing in our name and with our money.”

Iraq’s dwindling Christian population marked Christmas 2011 with bomb attacks across Baghdad that killed dozens of them. After U.S. forces completed their withdrawal from the country, Christian exodus from Iraq accelerated. “Our faithful in Iraq live in fear,” Chaldean Bishop Shlemon Warduni complained, “they feel there is no peace, no security, so they go where they can live in peace... The government cannot ensure their lives.”

The Christian community in Iraq was some two million strong before the US-led invasion of 2003. Up to four-fifths is estimated to have left the country in recent years following a series of attacks by Muslim extremists. While they were still there, the U.S. forces did little to protect them, leaving the task to the Iraqis. On October 31, 2010, an assault on a Baghdad church left 44 worshippers, two priests and seven security force members dead. According to Louis Sako, Chaldean archbishop of Kirkuk, “the security forces are not sufficiently prepared to ensure the protection of Christians.” He says that 57 churches and houses of worship in Iraq have been attacked since the invasion with a thousand Christians killed and more than 6 000 wounded.

At the outset of the Islamic conquests under Muhammad's successors all of these lands were 100 percent Christian. By the time the Ottomans took over they had a Christian plurality, and in Palestine and Lebanon the outright majority. Under the British Mandate (1919-1947), Palestine officially was a Christian country. Bethlehem, for instance, had a population that was 90 percent Christian. Today, they are disappearing: Bethlehem is now less than 10 percent Christian. Among almost three million Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, only 50,000 Christians remain. Within the pre-1967 borders of Israel there are six million people; only two percent are Christians. In the city of Jerusalem the Christian population has declined from 45,000 in 1940 to a few thousand today. At the current rate of decline, the Christian population will be a fraction of one percent in the year 2020, and there will be no living church in the land of Christ

If the Jewish or Muslim population of America or Western Europe were to start declining at a similar rate, there would be an outcry from their co-religionists all over the world. There would be government-funded programs to establish the causes and provide remedies, and

heart-rendering Hollywood movies. The endangered minority would be awarded instant victim status and be celebrated as such by the media and academia. But the disappearing Middle Eastern Christians, or their remnant, remain invisible to the Western world. It is evidently hard to be “post-Christian” without becoming anti-Christian.

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**YEMENI MAN BRINGS THE HORROR OF DRONE
STRIKES HOME TO U S SENATE**

Just six days after a US drone bombed his village, killing five militants in the process, a 23-year-old Yemeni writer named Farea Al-Muslimi travelled to Washington D.C. to tell the US Senate about the impact the strikes are having in his country.

In a powerful testimony to the assembled senators on Tuesday, excerpts of which are printed below, Mr Al-Muslimi said that rather than fighting terrorism, US drone strikes in his country were fueling it. He told the committee that he owed much to America, having first visited as an exchange student during his school years, and later won a scholarship to study for a semester at a US college. But he came with a simple request: that the US stop bombing his country.

“My name is Farea Al-Muslimi. I am from Wessab, a remote mountain village in Yemen, about nine hours’ drive from my country’s capital, Sana’a. Most of the world has never heard of Wessab. But just six days ago, my village was struck by a drone, in an attack that terrified thousands of simple, poor farmers. The drone strike and its impact tore my heart, much as the tragic bombings in Boston last week tore your hearts and also mine.

I am here today to talk about the human costs and consequences of targeted killing by the United States in Yemen.

Background

My family lives off the fruit, vegetables, and livestock we raise on our farms. We raise cows, goats, sheep, and hens. My father has been a farmer all his life. His income rarely exceeds \$200 per month. He learned to read late in life, but my mother never did.

I have 12 living siblings. I should actually have 19, but we lost seven of my brothers and sisters. Some passed away in delivery due to a lack of quality medical services in our village.

Others passed away when they were still young for the same reasons.

My life changed forever in the 9th grade when I was awarded a scholarship from the US State Department. The scholarship gave me an opportunity to study English for one year at Amideast, the American English Center in Yemen. This scholarship gave me new opportunities and allowed me to see the world beyond my village for the first time. I was later awarded a State Department scholarship to the Youth and Exchange Study program, which aims to build peace and understanding between the American people and people in Muslim countries.

That scholarship allowed me to spend a year living with an American family and attending an American high school. The year I spent at Rosamond High School in Rosamond, California was one of the richest and best years of my life.

The most exceptional experience was coming to know someone who ended up being like a father and is my best friend in the United States. He was a member of the US Air Force. Most of my year was spent with him and his family. He came to the mosque with me and I went to church with him. He taught me about his experiences in America and I taught him about my life in Yemen. We developed an amazing friendship that overcame our very different backgrounds.

A drone strike in my village

Today, I am a writer, speaker, and freelance journalist. One of the most rewarding experiences I have had has been working as a “fixer” for international journalists in Yemen and Beirut. Most of my work with international journalists has been in the southern provinces of Abyan, Aden, Al-dhalea and Lahj – three of the areas where the United States has focused its so-called “war on terror.”

Just six days ago, this so-called war came straight to my village. As I was thinking about my testimony and preparing to travel to the United States to participate in this hearing, I learned that a missile from a US drone had struck the village where I was raised.

For almost all of the people in Wessab, I’m the only person with any connection to the United States. They called and texted me that night with questions that I could not answer: Why was the United States terrifying them with these drones? Why was the United States trying to kill a person with a missile when everyone knows where he is and he could have

been easily arrested?

My village is beautiful, but it is very poor and in a remote part of Yemen. In the past, most of Wessab's villagers knew little about the United States. My stories about my experiences in America, my American friends, and the American values that I saw for myself helped the villagers I talked to understand the America that I know and love. Now, however, when they think of America they think of the terror they feel from the drones that hover over their heads ready to fire missiles at any time.

Instead of first experiencing America through a school or a hospital, most people in Wessab first experienced America through the terror of a drone strike. What radicals had previously failed to achieve in my village, one drone strike accomplished in an instant: there is now an intense anger and growing hatred of America.

Visiting the victims

In my work with foreign journalists, I have visited many areas struck by drones or warplanes that residents believe were dispatched as part of the targeted killing program conducted by the United States. I have traveled most frequently to Abyan, an area in southern Yemen, which had been seized in early 2011 by Ansar Al-Sharia, a group aligned with AQAP.

In Abyan and other places in Yemen, I visited many locations where local residents were suffering from the consequences of targeted killing operations. I have met with relatives of people who were killed by drone strikes as well as numerous eyewitnesses. They have told me how these air strikes have changed their lives for the worse.

In early March 2013, I was working with Newsweek in Abyan when I met the mother of a boy named Muneer Muhammed. Muneer, an 18 year old boy, transported goods for shops via his donkey in the local souk of Ja'ar town. He had recently been engaged and was preparing for his wedding. Muneer was at work when a missile hit and killed him in May 2012. She told me, in tears, that if she ever meets the individual who shot the missile, she will "crunch him into pieces" in her mouth.

The people with whom we spoke in Abyan told us that Muneer was not a member of AQAP. But that has not stopped AQAP from trying to use his death to recruit supporters to their cause.

Days after Abyan was freed from AQAP control in June 2012, I met a fisherman named Ali Al-Amodi in a hospital in Aden. The day before, his house in Shaqra, on the sea side of Abyan, was targeted by a US air strike. Al-Amodi told me that he stood helplessly as his 4 year old son and 6 year old daughter died in his arms on the way to the hospital. Al-Amodi had no links with AQAP. He and other locals said that his house was targeted by mistake.

In that same strike, four other children and one woman were killed. Witnesses said none were militants.

Later in June 2012, I visited Al-Makhzan, a town outside of Ja'ar, where a drone strike targeting Nader Al-Shadadi took place. Al-Shadadi is identified by the Yemeni government as a terrorist and a leader of Ansar Al-Shariah. He has been targeted at least three times in different places, but the strikes have missed him every time. This time, it targeted his aunt's house. Neighbors say he was not there, and his aunt's only son was killed. There is no evidence that the son was affiliated with AQAP.

I know that some policy makers in the United States and Yemen claim that AQAP does not use drone strikes as a tool to recruit more people to their cause. This is incorrect. The case of the Toaiman family in Mareb, as reported by NPR based on a trip in which I participated, is one specific example. The Toaiman's oldest son joined AQAP hoping to avenge the death of his father, an innocent civilian killed by a drone strike in October 2011. The son has 28 brothers waiting to do so as well. One of his youngest brothers, a 9 year old, carries a picture of a plane in his pocket. The boy openly states that he wants revenge and identifies his father's killer as "America."

Stop targeted killings

I don't know if there is anyone on Earth who feels more thankful to America than me. In my heart I know that I can only repay the opportunities, friendship, warmth, and exposure your country provided me by being their ambassador to Yemenis for the rest of my life, just as I was an ambassador for Yemenis in America. I strongly believe that I have helped improved America's image, perhaps in ways that an official ambassador or other diplomat cannot.

I have to say that the drone strikes and the targeted killing program have made my passion and mission in support of America almost impossible in Yemen. In some areas of Yemen, the anger against America that results from the strikes makes it dangerous for me to even acknowledge having visited America, much less testify how much my life changed thanks to

the State Department scholarships. It's sometimes too dangerous to even admit that I have American friends.

Late last year, I was with an American colleague from an international media outlet on a tour of Abyan. Suddenly, locals started to become paranoid. They were moving erratically and frantically pointing toward the sky. Based on their past experiences with drone strikes, they told us that the thing hovering above us – out of sight and making a strange humming noise – was an American drone. My heart sank. I was helpless. It was the first time that I had earnestly feared for my life, or for an American friend's life in Yemen. I was standing there at the mercy of a drone.

I also couldn't help but think that the operator of this drone just might be my American friend with whom I had the warmest and deepest friendship in America. My mind was racing and my heart was torn. I was torn between the great country that I know and love and the drone above my head that could not differentiate between me and some AQAP militant. It was one of the most divisive and difficult feelings I have ever encountered.

As someone who has lived and worked on this issue very closely, I cannot help but feel that the American and Yemen governments are losing the war against AQAP. Even when drone strikes target and kill the right people, it is at the expense of creating the many strategic problems I have discussed today. Every tactical success is at the expense of creating more strategic problems. I do, however, believe that things can still be fixed. If the United States wants to win the battle against AQAP in Yemen, I strongly suggest that it consider taking the following steps:

- * Stop all the targeted killing strikes.
- * Announce the names of those already on the "kill list," so that innocent civilians can stay out of harm's way.
- * Issue an official apology to the families of all civilians killed or injured by targeted killing strikes.
- * Compensate the families of innocent civilians killed or injured by strikes conducted or authorized by the United States.
- * In every village where there has been a targeted killing, build a school or hospital so that

the villagers' only experience with America will not be the death and destruction caused by an American missile.

Thank you very much.

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D R O N E W A R S

Washington Post, April 23, 2013

A bipartisan panel of senators held a spirited and unusually public debate Tuesday afternoon about the legality and unintended consequences of America's targeted killings overseas, a forum convened amid growing calls for stronger oversight of the government's use of armed drones outside conventional battlefields.

The White House declined to make a witness available for the hearing, titled "Drone Wars: The Constitutional and Counterterrorism Implications of Targeted Killings."

Rosa Brooks, a Georgetown University law professor who served as a Pentagon policy adviser, said: "Every individual detained, targeted, and killed by the U.S. government may well deserve his fate," she said. "But when a government claims for itself the unreviewable power to kill anyone, anywhere on Earth, at any time, based on secret criteria and secret information discussed in a secret process by largely unnamed individuals, it undermines the rule of law."

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Political Zionism is an agency of Big Business.
It is being used by Jewish and Christian
financiers in this country and Great Britain,
to make Jews believe that Palestine will be
ruled by a descendant of King David who will
ultimately rule the world. What delusion! It
will lead to war between Arabs and Jews and
eventually to war between Moslems and non-
Moslems. That will be the turning point of
history. (Henry H. Klein, *A Jew Warns Jews*, 1947)

For globalism to work, America can't be afraid to act like the almighty superpower that it is

... the hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist - McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the

world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies is called the United States Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps. (Thomas Friedman 03/99, *New York Times*)

American Naval tactical aircraft, operating from carriers in the Arabian Sea, have been flying simulated nuclear-weapons delivery missions - rapid ascending maneuvers known as "over the shoulder" bombing - since last summer, ... within range of Iranian coastal radars.

(Seymour Hersh, *New Yorker* (04/17/06))

What, brandish nuclear weapons! How reckless these warmongers have become, to telegraph their punches so.

Nonetheless, sucker-punched Gentiles, egged on by the Friedmans and the Krauthammers and other such mass-media pundits, volunteer themselves as bullet-stoppers, risking on the one hand being blown to bits or sickening and dying from depleted uranium (Gulf War Syndrome) while, on the other hand, being haunted forever by the innocent lives they took. Holding the whip-hand, the neo-con Zionists spur the Gentiles on "to stay the course" while Gentiles with bit in mouth, trot out at their command. Regarding the carnage Judeo-Christianity hath wrought, let us not say: "these are the works of Abraham." It's just too blasphemous.

For reasons best known to themselves, Zionists, say that after 1300 years these two world religions no longer can coexist, that to protect the homeland we must attack and occupy their land. Emboldened by the greatest arsenal of weaponry ever assembled in human history which they have put at their own disposal, Zionist Jews and Zionized Christians have instituted a "clash of civilizations"; in reality, a clash of religions. Suddenly up sprang permanent US military bases across the globe where none ever existed before in Afghanistan, Iraq, Uzbekistan, even in Paraguay, as downward and downward through mountain passes, and on city streets deadly ordinance, much of it radioactive, falls on the hapless peasantry below in a heartless bid to monopolize their region's oil. Outposts of freedom are these (700+ bases in 123 countries) or is this the forward basing of forces for the sake of advancing the great, world-wide, Judeo- Christian empire?

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OBAMA, MORSI, PLUNGE MIDDLE EAST INTO CHAOS

Gordon Duff

This week, President Obama announced that US “intelligence estimates” conclusively prove Syria has been using chemical weapons.

The US will now supply weapons and ammunition to Syrian rebels, the *Washington Post* says are, not just al-Qaeda “affiliates” but working to destabilize and “Balkanize” Iraq as well, “In an audio message posted online, the speaker identified as Baghdadi insists that a merger he announced in April with Syria’s al-Nusra Front, also known as Jabhat al-Nusra, to create a cross-border movement known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant will go on.

Al-Nusra is an al-Qaeda affiliate that has emerged as one of the most effective rebel factions in Syria.”

The US has also decided to leave F 16 jets inside Jordan after recent military exercises ended. However, despite calls by Egypt’s Mohamed Morsi for a “no fly zone” over Syria, President Obama has stated such an endeavor is “not in the best interest of the United States.

He should have added “at this time.”

WMD “Redux”

Obama’s claim that the Assad government in Syria has used chemical weapons is clearly a response to pressure placed on Washington by the powerful AIPAC/Israeli lobby.

AIPAC has orchestrated a nearly endless barrage of real or contrived “scandals,” sometimes carrying over Bush era crimes and blaming Obama, sometimes inventing them, such as the IRS “scandal,” and others, such as the Snowden revelations.

Snowden’s “whistle blowing” has allowed Americans to learn of the decade old communications interception program authorized by congress, exhaustively funded and publicly lauded by the American people who, after 9/11, jumped at every chance to sacrifice freedoms and

privacy for the promise of “security” that no longer seems as attractive as it may once have.

AIPAC’s ability to control, not just the entire Republican Party but key members of Obama’s own party and America’s press as well is believed to have pushed Obama into his high-risk position in Syria, one likely to bring the US into confrontation with Russia.

America, now offering limited military aid to a rebel organization proven to have, not just ties to terrorists but to have little backing among the Syrian people, is leading the United States toward potential humiliation.

Intelligence Meltdown

The US is currently “running” special operations teams inside Jordan and Turkey. These groups gather intelligence that is fed to them by rebel groups operating inside Syria.

Operating inside Syria are CIA teams, not “employees” as such but private contractors working for Black water, who pass on information fed to them by Israeli and French intelligence.

Both the Israelis and French have been manipulating US intelligence in order to push the US into declaring a “no fly zone” over Syria.

One would be advised to note that both Israel and France have huge stocks of biological and chemical weapons.

Israel has used chemical weapons and illegal cluster munitions along with DU (Depleted Uranium) against the civilian population of the occupied territories for many years.

The broader cabal, Israel, Britain, France, Turkey and now Egypt’s intent hasn’t been to weaken Syria as much as to push the US into an armed confrontation with Russia, intent on weakening US influence in the region.

The US is no longer the trusted ally to the world’s criminal elites it had been during the Bush administration. America has to be “taken down a peg or two.”

Global Chaos

In 1999, the Project for a New American Century, a Neocon “front” group for the Israel lobby in the US, planned the overthrow of the US government, a rigged election, a “stacked” Supreme Court to certify it and death threats against family members to prevent any repercussions.

At the same time, the invasion of Iraq was planned as a stepping-stone to conquering Iran.

To facilitate this, the 9/11 attacks were drawn up, operational groups formed, insurance and real estate transactions insuring massive profits for those involved were put into motion and, of course, as we are seeing again today in similar moves against Syria.

One might ask why no leader has responded to the real threat to the region, a “global meltdown” of sectarian violence, the rise of a multi-national Jihadist nation state and the suppression of democratic movements.

Then again, one might also ask, “what leaders?” Are there any to be seen?

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The U.S. House of Representatives passed a defense authorization bill that would make it U.S. policy to take “all necessary steps” to ensure Israel is able to “remove existential threats,” among them nuclear facilities in Iran.

“It is the policy of the United States to take all necessary steps to ensure that Israel possesses and maintains an independent capability to remove existential threats to its security and defend its vital national interests,” said the amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act passed Friday.

The amendment, initiated by Rep. Peter Roskam (R-Ill.) and first reported by Americans for Peace Now weekly legislative roundup, would require the president to report every 90 days on how the policy is being implemented.

That report would identify “all aerial refueling platforms, bunker-buster munitions, and other capabilities and maintenance by Israel of a robust independent capability to remove existential security threats, including nuclear and ballistic missile facilities in Iran, and defend its vital national interests.”

The language must survive the reconciliation process with the Senate and then be signed by the president in order to become law.

The amendment is similar to a non-binding resolution passed last month in the Senate that urged the president to provide “diplomatic, military, and economic support” to Israel should it be “compelled” to strike Iran’s suspected nuclear weapons program.

The House version of the defense authorization act already included a number of Israel-related measures, including tripling Obama’s request for missile defense cooperation funding from \$96 million to \$284 million.

The entire act passed Friday (June 14th, 2013) in a 315-108 vote. Roskam’s amendment passed by voice vote.

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THREAT OF FRENCH INTERVENTION

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius says the Syrian Army’s advance towards the strategic northern town of Aleppo must be halted.

“We must stop this progression before Aleppo. It is the next target of Hezbollah...,” Fabius said on Wednesday.

“We need to re-balance things because over the past few weeks the troops of Bashar al-Assad (Syrian President) and especially Hezbollah ... have gained considerable ground,” he said.

Fabius made the remarks after the Syrian government forces made gains in their fight with foreign-backed Takfiri insurgents in the flash point city of Aleppo.

On Wednesday, the Army announced that it regained full control of Kafar Hamra near Aleppo. Government forces liberated the area after heavy fighting with insurgents.

The Syrian Army’s latest success comes days after it recaptured the strategic city of Qusayr. Following the Qusayr liberation, the Army pledged to crush the foreign-backed insurgency across the Arab country.

Syrian troops were backed by forces from the Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah during the Qusayr operation.

The Syrian Army is now in control of most of the towns and villages near the border with Lebanon.

On June 11, France said it is considering whether to reinforce Takfiri militants in Syria with arms.

France is among the Western states that support over two years of militancy in Syria, which has claimed the lives of many people, including large numbers of Syrian soldiers.

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BEIRUT (AP) — Taking advantage of the chaos of the civil war, Syria's Kurdish minority has carved out a once unthinkable degree of independence in their areas, creating their own police forces, even their own license plates, and exuberantly going public with their language and culture.

But by pursuing their own path distinct from both the opposition and the regime, they are also colliding with Sunni rebels, who have increasingly clashed with Kurdish militiamen. Rebels have besieged a pocket of Kurdish towns and villages in the mainly Sunni Arab corner of northwest Syria for weeks, leading to reports of shortages of food and medicine.

The fighting threatens to expand into an ethnic war between Kurds and Arabs, adding another layer to the potent mix of fighters and conflicts in a brutal civil war that, according to the United Nations, has already killed 93,000 people. The ethnic tensions come on top of virulent sectarian hatreds between pro-rebel Sunnis and pro-regime Alawites and Shiites that have spiraled amid the fight for power.

Kurds are the largest ethnic minority in Syria, making up more than 10 percent of the country's 23 million people. They are centered in the poor northeastern regions of Hassakeh and Qamishli, wedged between the borders of Turkey and Iraq. The capital Damascus and Syria's largest city, Aleppo, also have several predominantly Kurdish neighborhoods.

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SYRIAN KURDS

Long put down by President Bashar Assad's regime, the Kurds are now exulting in the new,

de facto autonomy that they seized. As the fighting intensified last summer, particularly in the northern province of Aleppo, Assad's forces were stretched thin and pulled back from mainly Kurdish towns and villages near the Turkish border, ceding de facto control to armed Kurdish fighters.

Over the past year, some Kurds began openly calling for an officially autonomous region in Syria similar to that of northern Iraq.

Vehicles sporting license plates reading "Rojava Kurdistan," or "western Kurdistan," have become more common. Kurdish red, green and white flags with a sun in the middle — the same flag flown in Iraqi Kurdistan — fly over homes and public offices. A local police force known "Asayish," whose members include women, have taken over security in the areas abandoned last year by Assad's forces.

Kurds now study their own language and cultural heritage in schools. Under Assad, Kurds have not been allowed to openly teach their language or celebrate their New Year, or Nowruz, and Kurdish activists were routinely jailed.

"There was a political vacuum and it was filled," said Mustafa Osso, secretary general of the Azadi Kurdish Party in Syria and a senior member with the National Kurdish Council, an umbrella to 15 groups.

"A future Syria should be democratic, pluralist and cannot be ruled by a central government any more. We want to propose a political program that Syria be a federal state like Iraq," he told The Associated Press.

But Kurdish gunmen and rebels have fought several pitched battles over the past months.

Since late last month, rebels have laid siege to a predominantly Kurdish pocket around the town of Afrin, northwest of the city of Aleppo.

In a statement Monday, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights warned of shortages of food, milk and medicine in the Afrin area. It said hospitals in the area are concerned about the spread of tuberculosis because of a lack of medicines. The Afrin region, halfway between Aleppo and the Turkish border, has a population of more than half a million, along with more than 200,000 Syrians who fled there from fighting elsewhere, said the Observatory, an anti-regime group that has a network of activists on the ground.

The Afrin assault began when rebels wanted to pass through it to attack the predominantly Shiite villages of Nubul and Zahra, controlled by Assad loyalists, the head of the Observatory, Rami Abdul-Rahman, said. After Kurdish groups refused, rebels attacked Kurdish checkpoints and laid siege, beginning May 25.

Dozens have been killed on both sides in the clashes since, he said. Kurdish groups in the area are mostly secular, while the rebels in the northern regions are made up of Muslim extremists, including al-Qaida-linked Jabhat al-Nusra.

"There is no trust between the two sides," Abdul-Rahman told The Associated Press. "There are efforts taking place to prevent a bigger war that could burn the region."

The fighting reflects in part the Kurds' complicated response to Assad and the uprising against him. When the revolt began in March 2011, some Kurds joined in the peaceful protests against his rule.

Assad also tried to keep the community on his side by ceding ground on a major Kurdish demand, granting citizenship to some 200,000 Kurds who were registered as aliens before. The Kurds long complained of discrimination, and many of them were denied citizenship, making it difficult for them to find work or enroll in the state-run education system.

Kurds' suspicion of the opposition — increasingly dominated by Islamist fighters — kept many on the fence, much like members of other minorities like Christians. Fearing the future if Assad's secular regime collapses, Kurds have not thrown themselves into the armed uprising — beyond carving out their own interests.

The Kurds are also hampered by their own divisions among multiple factions, one of which is accused of openly siding with Assad's regime. Some Kurds say that the pro-government militia of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party, or PYD, is indirectly enforcing Assad's rule in several Kurdish areas it took over last year.

PYD, Syria's most powerful Kurdish group, is affiliated with the PKK, rebels who were fighting for autonomy in Kurdish-dominated southeastern Turkey.

The clashes between the two sides have involved PYD militiamen and extremist rebels, and the exiled opposition accuses the regime of stoking the tensions.

"The regime wants a sectarian war between Alawites and Sunnis and an ethnic war between Arabs and Kurds so that it appears to be everyone's protector and to say that the substitute (to the regime) would be chaos and infighting," said Abdelbaset Sieda, a senior Kurdish member of the main Western-backed opposition Syrian National Coalition.

"We are in contact with all parties to calm the situation and to consolidate all efforts against the regime," Sieda said.

The tension first began last summer when rebels captured several neighborhoods in the city of Aleppo. When the rebels reached the predominantly Kurdish neighborhood of Achrafieh, PYD members controlling the district told them not to enter.

Some rebels accused the PYD of being collaborators with the regime. The Kurds accused the Arab rebels of wanting to dominate their neighborhood.

The friction in Achrafieh was followed by clashes in Afrin, Tel Abyad, Hassakeh, Qamishli, Ras al-Ayn and Tel Tamr near the border with Turkey. The two sides clashed in Ras al-Ayn for three months until a cease-fire was reached in February.

Kaniwar Ayani, 28, an activist in Ras al-Ayn, said hard-line Islamist rebel factions are seeking to dominate the Kurds. When rebels entered the town, they prevented residents from raising any flag other than the militants' black banner with Islamic slogans, he said. When they went on mosque loudspeakers to demand Kurdish fighters surrender, the Kurds decided to stand up against them.

"The Islamic groups entered Ras al-Ayn to liberate it but they stayed to impose their will," Ayani said.

Many in the opposition react to Kurdish demands much like the Assad regime always has. They see the demands for autonomy — or even for greater rights — as an attempt to split the country. One point of friction is also control of oil fields in Hassakeh, especially the Rumailan field, currently held by Kurdish gunmen.

Kurdish autonomy in post-Assad Syria, similar to the Iraqi model, could strengthen long-standing demands for an independent homeland for the more than 25 million Kurds in parts of Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq.

"As Kurds, we have a right that we have been deprived from for decades. I frankly dream of a Kurdish state," said university student Shayar Aziz, 24, from the Kurdish town of Amouda.

A Syrian journalist in Ras al-Ayn, Syria, contributed reporting.

SYRIAN WAR THREATENS REGIONAL SECTARIAN BLOODBATH

21 June 2013

In the past weeks, Washington's strategy in the Middle East has emerged very clearly: it aims to exploit sectarian divisions, particularly between Sunni and Shia Muslims, to restructure the Middle East in its interests.

The US has mobilized a collection of Sunni Islamist guerrilla forces, in which Al Qaeda-linked forces play a major role, to fight the Shia Alawite-led regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. It now sees stoking up religious tensions in the region as the best way to build a broader base for a policy of isolating and targeting Iran—a Shia-dominated state allied to Shia-led Arab regimes in Syria, Iraq, and to the Lebanese Shia militia Hezbollah.

The past month has witnessed:

* Egypt's Islamist President Mohamed Mursi cut off diplomatic relations with Syria this week, after Egypt hosted a meeting of 70 Sunni religious organizations in Cairo that issued a statement calling for "jihad with mind, money, weapons—all forms of jihad."

* Qatar-based Egyptian cleric Sheikh Yousef al-Qaradawi, who attended the Cairo meeting, had already issued a global appeal for Sunnis to wage holy war in Syria. "Every Muslim trained to fight and capable of doing that must make himself available ... How could 100 million Shia defeat 1.7 billion Sunnis? Only because [Sunni] Muslims are weak," he stated.

* In Turkey, Washington is backing Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan as he moves to brutally crush protests against his Islamist government, including its support for the Syrian war.

*In Saudi Arabia, where tens of thousands of Lebanese Shia live, the monarchy plans to expel Hezbollah supporters in retaliation for Hezbollah's support for Assad.

The horrific implications of Washington's policy were recognized even by former US Ambassador to Yugoslavia Peter Galbraith, who commented: "The next genocide in the world will likely be against the Alawites in Syria."

While opposition detachments backed by NATO Special Forces and warplanes succeeded in toppling the Libyan regime and murdering Libyan Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, the Assad government in Damascus has proven too powerful for Islamist militias to overcome.

Recent polls show that only 15 percent of Americans support escalating aid to the Syrian opposition, and 28 percent of Turks support Erdogan's war policy. A Pew Research Center poll last month found 80 percent of Lebanese were hostile to the US arming the Syrian opposition—including 66 percent of Lebanese Sunnis—along with 59 percent of Egyptians and 60 percent of Tunisians.

Contrary to media accounts of the Middle East that portray it as seething with religious hatreds, there is long tradition of socialist struggles by the working class of the Middle East. After World War II, there were mass Communist parties in all the region's major states—in Syria, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, and beyond. The tragedy is that these parties were dominated by Stalinist leaderships that entered into counter-revolutionary political alliances with Middle Eastern bourgeois national leaderships, such as the Syrian Baathist regime of Assad.

This led to disaster in one country after another, as Washington and its European imperialist allies were able to manipulate ethno-sectarian tensions and promote right-wing Islamist forces, from the Sunni mujahedin of the 1980s Soviet-Afghan war, out of which Al Qaeda emerged, to the Al Qaeda-linked Islamists of today's Libyan and Syrian wars.
(Alex Lantier)

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**SPECIAL REPORT: SYRIA'S ISLAMISTS SEIZE CONTROL
AS MODERATES DITHER**

Syria | Wed Jun 19, 2013 6:10am EDT

(Reuters) - As the Syrian civil war got under way, a former electrician who calls himself

Sheikh , they came to number 2,000 men, he said, here in the northern city of Aleppo. Then, virtually overnight, they collapsed.

Omar's group, Ghurabaa al-Sham, wasn't defeated by the government. It was dismantled by a rival band of revolutionaries - hardline Islamists.

The Islamists moved against them at the beginning of May. After three days of sporadic clashes Omar's more moderate fighters, accused by the Islamists of looting, caved in and dispersed, according to local residents. Omar said the end came swiftly.

The Islamists confiscated the brigade's weapons, ammunition and cars, Omar said. "They considered this war loot. Maybe they think we are competitors," he said. "We have no idea about their goals. What we have built in two years disappeared in a single day."

The group was effectively marginalized in the struggle to overthrow Syria's President Bashar al-Assad. Around 100 fighters are all that remain of his force, Omar said.

It's a pattern repeated elsewhere in the country. During a 10-day journey through rebel-held territory in Syria, Reuters journalists found that radical Islamist units are sidelining more moderate groups that do not share the Islamists' goal of establishing a supreme religious leadership in the country.

The moderates, often underfunded, fragmented and chaotic, appear no match for Islamist units, which include fighters from organizations designated "terrorist" by the United States.

The Islamist ascendancy has amplified the sectarian nature of the war between Sunni Muslim rebels and the Shi'ite supporters of Assad. It also presents a barrier to the original democratic aims of the revolt and calls into question whether the United States, which announced practical support for the rebels last week, can ensure supplies of weapons go only to groups friendly to the West.

The moderates are losing ground. In many parts of rebel-held Aleppo, the red, black and green revolutionary flag which represents more moderate elements has been replaced with the black Islamic flag. Small shops selling black headbands, conservative clothing and black balaclavas have popped up around the city and their business is booming.

(Additional reporting by Mark Hosenball in Washington; Editing By Richard Woods and

Simon Robinson)