

Controversy Surrounding MintPress Chemical Weapons Ghouta Report Continues

By [Prof Michel Chossudovsky](#)
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[Voice of Russia](#)

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In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

On August 29, MintPress, an American news website, published an article “Syrians in Ghouta Claim Saudi-Supplied Rebels Behind Chemical Attack” allegedly co-authored by Dale Gavlak, reportedly an AP part-time writer, and Yahva Ababneh. Three weeks after the article appeared, Ms. Gavlak issued a statement insisting that her name should not have been attached to it and that the “sole reporter and author” of the article was Yahya Ababneh. The Voice of Russia launched its own investigation into this intricate story and contacted Professor Michel Chossudovsky, a Canadian economist and Professor of economics at the University of Ottawa, to inquire about his opinion on the controversial article.

Gavlak, an American freelance journalist whose work has often been published by The Associated Press, now says the article was based entirely on reporting by Yahva Ababneh, a Jordanian journalist, and her only role was to help Mr. Ababneh with the writing.

In this regard, Ms. Gavlak sent the Voice of Russia a letter which stated the following:

“I did not travel to Syria, have any discussions with Syrian rebels, or do any other reporting on which the article is based. The article is not based on my personal observations and should not be given credence based on my journalistic reputation,” the statement read.

In a subsequent e-mail to The New York Times blog, The Lede, Ms. Gavlak added that MintPress had refused to remove her byline from the article and that after several unanswered demands she decided to hire a lawyer to press her case. However, in an e-mail to the Brown Moses blog Gavlak admitted that she had helped Ababneh “write up” the story, that she had sent it to Mint Press herself once it was completed and that she had vouched for Ababneh’s journalistic credentials.

Mnar Muhawesh, executive director and editor at large for MintPress News, disputed Gavlak’s account of the events connected to the article in a statement published on the MintPress website on September 21st. Ms. Muhawesh said that “Gavlak wrote the article in its entirety as well as conducted the research”. The editor added that Gavlak is under “mounting pressure” by third parties who are threatening to end her career over the article. Ms. Muhawesh stressed that Gavlak informed MintPress that these “third parties” are in turn being pressured by the head of Saudi Intelligence, Prince Bandar, who is accused in the article of supplying the Syrian rebels with chemical weapons.

Ms. Muhawesh also added that Yahva Ababneh has also contacted the news source saying that he was under pressure from the Saudi embassy in connection with the article. A

clarification has since been published on the website that Gavlak was the writer and researcher for the article while Ababneh was the reporter on the ground.

The Voice of Russia contacted MintPress directly to inquire about the details of the story, however the website's team rejected the request saying that another statement by Ms. Muhawesh will be released soon where Ms. Gavlak is expected to retract her previous claims that she did not write the article.



Screenshot: Facebook.com/Nadezhda Kulikova

According to the MintPress official, Ms. Gavlak is now saying that she did write this article, however the editorial team cannot comment on this matter just yet.



Screenshot: Facebook.com/Nadezhda Kulikova

While MintPress News are not conducting interviews regarding Ms. Gavlak's and Mr. Ababneh's article, Ms. Muhawesh is sympathizing with the authors' sensitive position.

At the same time, however, MintPress has refused to remove Gavlak's name completely since that would violate the ethics of journalism, according to Ms. Muhawesh.

To that effect, Professor Michael Chossudovsky agrees with Ms. Muhawesh, suggesting that even before the scandal erupted, Ms Gavlak asserted that she did not conduct work in the field, however she admitted that she assisted her colleague in writing up the article and translating it from Arabic into English. In this sense, Chossudovsky proposes to view the controversial piece as a "joint article" which he says is very common in journalism when one person works in the field and another in the US helps him or her to write it up afterwards.

It does not surprise Professor Chossudovsky that Ms Gavlak now wants her name to be removed from the article. "Obviously, she want to be cleared of that because she is threatened by Saudi Arabia and she also risks to lose her job with Associated Press", says Chossudovsky.

Chossudovsky also contends that this story is very significant because "everything suggests that what Ms Gavlak and Mr Ababneh reported in that article is correct". While the expert admits that the Mint Press report is incomplete, he nonetheless sees it as a credible piece of information when it is corroborated by other reports. For Chossudovsky, the report not only supports the assertion that Syrian rebels, rather than Assad's forces, launched the Ghouta attack, but also suggests that the August 21st attacks were a "series of very carefully staged events".

As for Ms Gavlak's future prospects, the Professor assumes that her career as a mainstream journalist might well be over. "I suspect she will be fired, if she hasn't already been fired," Chossudovsky claims. "Associated Press will not want to take her back as a mainstream reporter. They will do their utmost to camouflage this report and other reports which are being published concerning this east Ghouta chemical weapons attack".

Professor Chossudovsky insists that the Syrian Government is unlikely to be the perpetrator

of the Ghouta attack and urges the world public to view the MintPress report seriously. "Damascus didn't do it," Chossudovsky says. "And that is crucial that Russian people know about this. At least Mr. Lavrov must know about it, he must see this report. That news has to get out".

In this respect, the expert calls on major media outlets to follow this story very closely. As an editor of the Globe Research, Professor Chossudovsky claims that he himself is trying his best to get more details on the MintPress report. However, Professor Chossudovsky admits that internet editions such as Globe Research do not have the capabilities and sources of major media outlets in this matter.

"We don't have such a network that the Voice of Russia has on this matter", says Chossudovsky, "but that news is so crucial that it has to get out".

[‘Syrian rebels take responsibility for the chemical attack admitting the weapons were provided by Saudis’ - source](#)

In an interview with Yahya Ababneh, the independent journalist, Syrian rebels tacitly implied that they were responsible for last week's chemical attack. Some information could not immediately be independently verified.

"From numerous interviews with doctors, Ghouta residents, rebel fighters and their families....many believe that certain rebels received chemical weapons via the Saudi intelligence chief, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, and were responsible for carrying out the (deadly) gas attack," he writes in the [article](#).

The rebels noted it was a result of an accident caused by rebels mishandling chemical weapons provided to them.

"My son came to me two weeks ago asking what I thought the weapons were that he had been asked to carry," said Abu Abdel-Moneim, the father of a rebel fighting to unseat Assad, who lives in Ghouta.

As Yahya Ababneh reports, Abdel-Moneim said his son and 12 other rebels died in a weapons storage tunnel. The father stated the weapons were provided to rebel forces by a Saudi militant, known as Abu Ayesha, describing them as having a "tube-like structure" while others were like a "huge gas bottle."

"They didn't tell us what these arms were or how to use them," complained a female fighter named 'K'. "We didn't know they were chemical weapons. We never imagined they were chemical weapons."

"When Saudi Prince Bandar gives such weapons to people, he must give them to those who know how to handle and use them," she warned. She, like other Syrians, do not want to use their full names for fear of retribution.

Ababneh also refers to an article in the UK's Daily Telegraph about [secret Russian-Saudi talks](#) stating that Prince Bandar threatened Russian President Vladimir Putin with terror attacks at next year's Winter Olympics in Sochi if Russia doesn't agree to change its stance on Syria.

"Prince Bandar pledged to safeguard Russia's naval base in Syria if the Assad regime is

toppled, but he also hinted at Chechen terrorist attacks on Russia's Winter Olympics in Sochi if there is no accord," the article stated.

"I can give you a guarantee to protect the Winter Olympics next year. The Chechen groups that threaten the security of the games are controlled by us," Saudi Prince allegedly told Vladimir Putin.

Mint Press News stated that some of the information couldn't be independently verified and pledged to continue providing updates on this topic.

[Nadezhda Kulikova](#), [Yulia Zamanskaya](#), [Tosi Ivanova](#)

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