

Jabhat al-Nusra Rebels Admit Responsibility for Chemical Weapons Attack

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Militants tell AP reporter they mishandled Saudi-supplied chemical weapons, causing accident

Syrian rebels in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta have admitted to Associated Press correspondent Dale Gavlak that they were responsible for last week's chemical weapons incident which western powers have blamed on Bashar Al-Assad's forces, revealing that the casualties were the result of an accident caused by rebels mishandling chemical weapons provided to them by Saudi Arabia.



"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," [writes Gavlak](#). (back up version [here](#)).

Rebels told Gavlak that they were not properly trained on how to handle the chemical weapons or even told what they were. It appears as though the weapons were initially supposed to be given to the Al-Qaeda offshoot Jabhat al-Nusra.

"We were very curious about these arms. And unfortunately, some of the fighters handled the weapons improperly and set off the explosions," one militant named 'J' told Gavlak.

His claims are echoed by another female fighter named 'K', who told Gavlak, "They didn't tell us what these arms were or how to use them. We didn't know they were chemical weapons. We never imagined they were chemical weapons."

Abu Abdel-Moneim, the father of an opposition rebel, also told Gavlak, "My son came to me two weeks ago asking what I thought the weapons were that he had been asked to carry," describing them as having a "tube-like structure" while others were like a "huge gas bottle." The father names the Saudi militant who provided the weapons as Abu Ayesha.

According to Abdel-Moneim, the weapons exploded inside a tunnel, killing 12 rebels.

"More than a dozen rebels interviewed reported that their salaries came from the Saudi government," writes Gavlak.

If accurate, this story could completely derail the United States' rush to attack Syria which

has been founded on the “undeniable” justification that Assad was behind the chemical weapons attack. Dale Gavlak’s credibility is very impressive. He has been a Middle East correspondent [for the Associated Press](#) for two decades and has also worked for National Public Radio (NPR) and written articles for [BBC News](#).

The website on which the story [originally appeared](#) – Mint Press (which is currently down as a result of huge traffic it is attracting to the article) is a legitimate media organization based in Minnesota. The [Minnesota Post did a profile](#) on them last year.

Saudi Arabia’s alleged role in providing rebels, whom they have vehemently backed at every turn, with chemical weapons, is no surprise given the revelations earlier this week that the Saudis threatened Russia with terror attacks at next year’s Winter Olympics in Sochi unless they abandoned support for the Syrian President.

“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,” Prince Bandar allegedly told Vladimir Putin, [the Telegraph reports](#).

The Obama administration is set to present its intelligence findings today in an effort prove that Assad’s forces were behind last week’s attack, despite American officials [admitting to the New York Times](#) that there is no “smoking gun” that directly links President Assad to the attack.

US intelligence officials also [told the Associated Press](#) that the intelligence proving Assad’s culpability is “no slam dunk.”

[As we reported earlier this week](#), intercepted intelligence revealed that the Syrian Defense Ministry was making “panicked” phone calls to Syria’s chemical weapons department demanding answers in the hours after the attack, suggesting that it was not ordered by Assad’s forces.

UPDATE: Associated Press contacted us to confirm that Dave Gavlak is an AP correspondent, but that her story was not published under the banner of the Associated Press. We didn’t claim this was the case, we merely pointed to Gavlak’s credentials to stress that she is a credible source, being not only an AP correspondent, but also having written for PBS, BBC and Salon.com.

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