

The War Comes To Syria

By [Devon Douglas-Bowers](#)

Global Research, June 16, 2013

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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It has recently been announced that the Obama administration has decided to go ahead and arm the Syrian rebels on the grounds that they have “obtained proof the Syrian government used chemical weapons against fighters trying to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad.”[1] Interestingly enough, up until this time, it has been noted by the UN that there is no clear evidence that either side had used chemical weapons.[2]

While it may seem that the Obama administration is doing this to aid the rebellion, there may also be other factors at play.

It first needs to be noted that this announcement is only new in that the US government is actually admitting that they are arming the Syrian rebels. It has been known for quite some time that the US and its allies have been arming the Syrian rebels, mainly indirectly on the part of the US[3], but there has been direct aid on the part of America’s allies. In February of last year, International Business Times reported that “Syrian rebel forces are already being armed and supplied by Western powers” and that

Syrian National Council member Bassma Kodmani said unidentified countries were already providing communications equipment, body armor and night-vision goggles to the Free Syrian Army, a move previously denied by Western governments.

According to the paper, Kodmani refused to reveal which countries were helping, but [s]he hinted that allies were also sending more lethal weapons such as rifles.

Defensive and light equipment are what they are doing on the ground, she told the Telegraph. [4] (emphasis added)

Thus, the West has been arming the rebels for quite some time. Yet, at this moment the mainstream media is mainly discussing the admission that the US will openly be arming the Syrian rebels and stating that it is due to the “proof” the Obama administration has that the Assad regime has used chemical weapons. While it is possible that the Assad regime did in fact use chemical weapons, we need to remain skeptical as the US has launched media wars before on governments that it opposed, such as the Gaddafi government, with the West stating that Gaddafi had bombed his own civilians and gave Viagra for his troops to rape women; when the conflict ended, it was found that Amnesty International “failed to find evidence for these human rights violations and in many cases has discredited or cast doubt on them. It also found indications that on several occasions the rebels in Benghazi appeared to have knowingly made false claims or manufactured evidence.”[5] (emphasis added)

Thus, we should withhold judgment until the 'proof' is presented (if at all).

This sudden change in policy may have to do with much more than just the alleged use of chemical weapons. The change may have been "prompted by the realization that Syrian President Bashar Assad was on the cusp of gaining a permanent advantage over rebel groups and the fear of imminent sectarian bloodshed further spilling into neighboring Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon." [6] It is quite evident that Assad may be gaining the upper hand in the conflict as Germany's foreign intelligence agency, the Bundesnachrichtendienst (Federal Intelligence Agency in English), drastically changed its assessment of the Syrian conflict and they now believe that "the Syrian military of autocrat Bashar Assad is more stable than it has been in a long time and is capable of undertaking successful operations against rebel units at will." [7] The BND chief even stated that "Each new battle weakens the militias further." [8] (emphasis added) The addition of Hezbollah is only enforcing this idea as it was reported just last week that the Syrian military and its allies in Hezbollah not only retook the key city of Qusair, but were still pushing northward.

Yet, there was also a question of perception of the US as what Obama's aides were most concerned with "was the perception that world's sole superpower was standing by while European allies shouldered the burden of trying to stop a dictator from murdering thousands of his own people." [9] So it seems that partially the Obama administration was more concerned with PR rather than the Syrian people, whom they claim to care so much about.

At the end of the day, it doesn't seem as if this will do any good for the Syrians as the rebels are extremely dependent upon radical Islamist groups [10] and both the rebels and the Assad government have been accused of committing war crimes. [11] The US arming the rebels will only lengthen the conflict and make it much deadlier and if the Assad regime does fall, it looks like the new one will be about the same.

The war has come to Syria and the people will continue to suffer.

Notes

1: Reuters, U.S. considers no-fly zone after Syria crosses nerve gas "red line",
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/14/us-syria-crisis-idUSBRE95C16L20130614> (June 14, 2013)

2: Al Jazeera, UN: No clear proof of Syria chemical arms use,
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/05/201356135529534687.html> (May 6, 2013)

3: Erich Schmitt, "C.I.A. Said to Aid in Steering Arms to Syrian Opposition," New York Times, June 21, 2012

(<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/21/world/middleeast/cia-said-to-aid-in-steering-arms-to-syrian-rebels.html?pagewanted=all>)

4: Oliver Tree, "Western Allies Arming Rebels in Syria, Opposition Claims, as Red Cross Reach Besieged Homs," International Business Times, February 24, 2012
(<http://www.ibtimes.com/western-allies-arming-rebels-syria-opposition-claims-red-cross-reach-besieged-homs-415842>)

5: Patrick Cockburn, "Amnesty questions claim that Gaddafi ordered rape as weapon of war," The Independent, June 24, 2011

(<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/amnesty-questions-claim-that-gaddafi-ordered-rape-as-weapon-of-war-2302037.html>)

6: Reid J. Epstein and Glenn Thrush, "Syria chemical weapons: President Obama's forced hand," Politico, June 13, 2013

(http://www.politico.com/story/2013/06/president-obama-syria-chemical-weapons-92782.html?hp=t1_s)

7: Matthias Gebauer, "Syrian Rebels in Trouble: German Intelligence Sees Assad Regaining Hold," Der Spiegel, May 22, 2013

(<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/german-intelligence-believes-assad-regime-regaining-lost-power-a-901188.html>)

8: Ibid

9: CBS, Assad's troops in Syria, backed by Hezbollah, push rebels further north,

http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-202_162-57588210/assads-troops-in-syria-backed-by-hezbollah-push-rebels-further-north/ (June 7, 2013)

10: Politico, June 13, 2013

11: David Enders, "Al Qaida-linked group Syria rebels once denied now key to anti-Assad victories," McClatchy DC, December 2, 2012

(<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2012/12/02/176123/al-qaida-linked-group-syria-rebels.html#.UbtmbFSMKJD>)

12: Zeina Karam, "Both Assad and rebels committing war crimes, atrocities a 'daily reality' in Syrian civil war: UN," National Post, June 4, 2013

(<http://news.nationalpost.com/2013/06/04/both-assad-and-rebels-committing-war-crimes-atrocities-a-daily-reality-in-syrian-civil-war-un/>)

Devon DB is a 21 year old independent writer and researcher. He is currently the Politics/Government Department Chair at [the Hampton Institute](#). He can be contacted at [devondb\[at\]mail\[dot\]com](mailto:devondb[at]mail[dot]com).

The original source of this article is Global Research

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