

Report links US-backed Syrian opposition to Ghouta gas attack

By Patrick Martin
2 September 2013

A report by Minneapolis-based Mint Press News (MPN) links the chemical weapons attack in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta to US-backed opposition forces fighting the Syrian regime. This flatly contradicts unsubstantiated US allegations that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is responsible for the Ghouta attack—the claim Washington is using as its pretext to attack Syria.

MPN published an article with interviews with opposition fighters on the ground in Ghouta. Its two authors are Jordanian freelance journalist Yahya Ababneh and Dale Gavlak—a longtime correspondent for the Associated Press, based in Amman, Jordan for more than two decades, who currently reports for AP and National Public Radio, as well as MPN.

Those interviewed included Abu Abdel-Moneim, whose son was among 13 opposition fighters killed in a tunnel used to store what were apparently chemical weapons.

Abdel-Moneim said the weapons were supplied by a Saudi named Abu Ayesha, who leads a rebel battalion. He described some of the weapons as having a “tube-like structure,” while others were like a “huge gas bottle.” They were stored in tunnels, while the opposition fighters themselves slept in nearby mosques and private homes.

A female fighter who spoke with the news service complained, “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.”

She added, “When Saudi Prince Bandar gives such weapons to people, he must give them to those who know how to handle and use them.”

Prince Bandar is the former longtime Saudi ambassador to the United States, who returned from

decades in Washington, where he had the closest ties to the US military-intelligence apparatus, to head the Saudi intelligence service. He is reportedly the main Saudi sponsor, fundraiser and arms supplier for Syrian opposition forces. At least a dozen opposition fighters interviewed in the MPN report said they were on the payroll of Saudi Arabia.

An opposition leader in Ghouta told MPN that the Al Nusra Front, one of the main Islamic fundamentalist militias operating in Syria, had custody of the chemical weapons. “They do not share secret information. They merely used some ordinary rebels to carry and operate this material,” he said. “We were very curious about these arms. And unfortunately, some of the fighters handled the weapons improperly and set off the explosions.”

Besides the MPN report, a report in Germany’s *taz* newspaper also links the opposition forces to chemical weapons attacks. The *taz* posted the transcript of an intercepted telephone conversation posted on Facebook between an Al Nusra fighter in Syria and a financier in the US-allied Persian Gulf sheikhdom of Qatar.

Trying to convince the financier that his forces are in a strong position to attack and retake the city of Homs, the Al Nusra fighter says: “Brother, we got as far as [redacted], and we fired chemical weapons, my brother.”

After a pause, the Qatari financier replies: “Yes, I have been informed of that. Give me the details, prepare them, and tell me how I should transfer the money.”

There has been no effort to respond to, explain or rebut these reports by the US government or the corporate-controlled media, which is instead braying unanimously that the atrocity was carried out by the Syrian government.

According to the British newspaper *Independent*, Saudi intelligence—headed by Prince Bandar—was the first to allege use of sarin gas by the Syrian regime, in communications to the US and other imperialist powers in February. At the time, UN commissioner Carla del Ponte looked into the charges and concluded that it was the rebels who had used chemical weapons, not the Assad regime.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>