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## The sarin shells fired on Damascus - by Syrian 4th Division's 155th Brigade - were followed by rockets on Israel and car bombings in Lebanon

DEBKAFfile Exclusive Analysis August 24, 2013, 11:32 AM (IDT)

Tags: [chemical weapons](#), [Syria-Israeli-Jordan borders](#), [Iran](#), [Lebanon](#), [missile attacks](#), [Barack Obama](#), [Chuck Hagel](#)



Assad's chemical weapons arsenal



In the space of 48 hours, the Assad regime, Iran and Hizballah launched a three-point offensive against foreign intervention, **DEBKAFfile** reports. Here are some facts: The sarin nerve gas atrocity of Wednesday, Aug. 21, alleged to have claimed more than 1,000 lives, was the work of the 155th Brigade of the Syrian army's 4th Division, headed by President Bashar Asad's younger brother Gen. Maher Assad.

The poison gas shells were fired from the big Mount Kalmun army base south of Damascus, one of the three repositories of Syria's chemical weapons. In response to a demand from Moscow last December, Assad collected his chemical assets in three depots. The other two are Dummar, a suburb 5 kilometers outside Damascus, and the Al-Safira air base, west of Aleppo.

Not a single shell or gram of poison gas is loaded for use at any of the three sites without an explicit directive from the president or his brother.

Therefore, the clamor raised by the US and French presidents, Western prime ministers and Russian leaders for an independent investigation to turn up evidence of the use of chemical weapons in Syria and identity of its perpetrator – the Assad regime, says the West, and a rebel provocation, according to Moscow – is nothing but playacting. The facts are known and the evidence is present. And the price for refusing to come down to earth and putting an immediate stop to this horrifying precedent may be unimaginably grim – not just for Israel and Jordan – but for the rest of the Middle East and beyond.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu commented Thursday, Aug. 22 that Iran is using Syria as its testing ground while closely monitoring international responses to its actions.

His remark followed the four Grad rockets fired on northern Israel the day after the chemical attack in East Damascus. His words were scarcely noticed, mainly because Israel's own spokesmen were busy spreading a blanket of disinformation over the attack, attributing it vaguely to "Global Jihad" (whatever that is).

**DEBKAFfile's** military sources affirm that, just as the Assad brothers orchestrated the chemical shell attack on Syrian civilians, so too did Hizballah's leader Hassan Nasrallah set in motion the rocket attack on Israel.

By good fortune, the two which exploded in built-up areas caused damage but no casualties and a third was intercepted by Iron Dome.

Nasrallah had his disposal two Palestinian terrorist groups functioning in Lebanon and Syria under direct Iranian command. They are the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestinian – General Command (PFLP-GC) and Jihad Islami – both of them eager to attack Israel.

Then, on Friday night, two car bombs blew up outside Sunni mosques in the northern Lebanese town of Tripoli, killing 42 people and injuring 500.

The triple coordinated outrages added up to a dire warning from Tehran and Damascus about what they have in store for the region, and especially Syria's neighbors, as payback for foreign intervention in the Syrian civil war.

On the subject of intervention, the French daily Le Figaro took the liberty last Thursday, Aug. 23, of lifting wholesale and publishing without credit the [exclusive report carried Wednesday, Aug. 21, by DEBKAFfile](#). We were the first publication in the world to reveal on Saturday, Aug. 17 the entry from Jordan into southern Syria of a unit of US-trained Syrian rebel commandoes, under the caption: **Reported Syrian gas attack after first US-trained rebel incursion from Jordan**.

In that report, **DEBKAFfile** was also the first to expose Assad's poison gas attack as a warning of the heavy price he would exact for intervention in the Syrian war by foreign forces or by rebels trained by foreign forces – in this case US instructors and officers based in Jordan.

CBS News reported Friday that US and Israel intelligence monitoring known chemical weapons sites detected activity there 20 minutes before the chemical shells were fired Wednesday. Those agencies were therefore on top of valuable advance information, but did nothing to stop - or even warn against - the coming poison gas attack.

Washington and other Western capitals as well as Israel continued to circle around reality Friday and Saturday, when Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel let it be known that US warships had been sent to the region for possible cruise missile attacks, in case the president decided on action against Syria.

The Secretary "forgot" to mention that, had the president really wanted to do something, all he had to do was keep the USS Truman aircraft carrier, which was present in the Mediterranean on Wednesday, the day of the chemical attack, from sailing out through the Suez Canal Thursday.

Furthermore, America doesn't need to send more warships to the region for possible attacks on Syria. It holds plenty of assets at US air and missile bases crisscrossing the Middle East, southern and central Europe and the Persian Gulf. All are fully capable of conducting a variety of operations against Syria without bringing in extra warships.

Except that none of these assets has so far been ordered into action.

What could the Obama administration do if it was so minded?

**DEBKAFfile's** exclusive military sources described three options available: **One:** Striking the Syrian unit which perpetrated the poison gas last Wednesday east of Damascus. **Two:** Destroying the Syrian army's three chemical weapons depots. Or **Three:** Coordinated attacks on the first two targets.

For **Options Two** and **Three**, the attack would have to destroy all the poison shells at once before they exploded and leaked contamination across wide regions of Syria and neighboring Turkey, Israel and Jordan. The Syrian ruler is capable of having the shells' contents mixed and armed ready for use ahead of a US attack, thus maximizing the deadly impact of lethal gases across a broad Middle East region.

Notwithstanding the grave risks of action, the consequences of inaction by the US and Israel would be worse: It would give Damascus and Tehran a green light for escalating their viciousness – and not just against the Syrian people. If the barbarity is not stopped, they will get away with making nerve gas and other poison substances acceptable weapons for fighting their foes. Lebanon and Israel are in extreme jeopardy.

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