

Syrian government unleashes vicious chemical attack

by Kelsey Fleming

World Editor

In March of 2011, political conflicts within Syria escalated into a violent and chaotic civil war. Over 100,000 people have perished in the past two years as a result of the ongoing conflicts between the Bashar al-Assad regime and the Syrian rebels. On Fri., Aug. 21, the Al-Assad regime launched the worst chemical weapons attack in the past 25 years. The attack took place in the suburbs of Damascus, killing hundreds of people, including women and children.

In a written statement, a senior Obama administration official said, "Based on the reported number of victims, reported symptoms of those who were killed or injured, witness accounts and other facts gathered by open sources, the U.S. intelligence community, and international partners, there is very little doubt at this point that a chemical weapon was used by the Syrian regime against civilians in this incident." He later went on to say, "If the Syrian government had nothing to hide and wanted to prove to the world that it had not used chemical weapons in this incident, it would have ceased its attacks on the area and granted immediate access to the UN."

This particular chemical attack killed 1,429 people, 426 of whom were children. According to investigators, blood and hair samples collected after the attack have tested positive for sarin, a toxic nerve agent that affects the nervous system. Sarin, which is odorless, tasteless, and colorless, is a highly illegal toxin that kills within minutes. Secretary of State John Kerry has described the attack as an "indiscriminate, inconceivable horror of chemical weapons."

"Instead of being tucked safely in their beds at home," Kerry said, "we saw rows of children lying side by side, sprawled on a hospital floor, all of them dead from Assad's gas and surrounded by parents and grandparents who had suffered the same fate.... Even the first responders—the doctors, nurses, and medics who tried to save them—they became victims themselves. We saw them gasping for air, terrified that their own lives were in danger." Kerry went on to say, "Fatigue does not absolve us of our responsibility. Just longing for peace does not necessarily bring it about."

According to Kerry, Assad's use of chemical weapons puts him in the same category as the world's most malicious and despicable



RUINS AND TURMOIL: The Syrian civil war leaves cities in shambles and wreckage.

dictators. Kerry stated, "Bashar al-Assad now joins the list of Adolf Hitler and Saddam Hussein [who] have used these weapons in [the] time of war."

Only five days after the brutal chemical attack in Damascus, the Syrian government committed another cruel and "apocalyptic" attack on a school of young children. On Mon., Aug. 26, a horrific napalm attack on a school killed ten children and injured dozens. An unidentified student said, "I didn't hear anything. We just saw people burning. My classmates were burning. It felt like Judgment Day."

The vicious chemical attack has prompted debates in Washington over whether or not to engage in the Syrian conflict. According to the UN, Damascus and the Syrian government have agreed to a ceasefire while UN forces investigate the area. On Mon., Aug. 26, unidentified snipers shot at a UN team while they investigated the gas attack site.

As UN forces and the US military decide on what to do in the upcoming days, the US must be wary of a tentative line.

During a meeting with Baltic leaders, President Barack Obama said, "This kind of offense is a challenge to the world." In past reports, he called the attack an "assault on human dignity." On Thurs., Aug. 29, the British Parliament voted against military action in Syria.

In an announcement on Sat., Aug. 31, President Obama said that he plans to take limited action against the Syrian government. On Sept. 9, President Obama met with the House and Senate and discussed his military plan in further depth. He may now be able to avoid a long and heated Congressional debate by exploring one of Kerry's suggestions. In Kerry's speech, he proposed that if Syria relinquishes their chemical weapons, US military intervention would not be necessary. Diplomats are now exploring this idea and trying to find a middle ground. According to Syrian officials, they are prepared to disclose the locations of their chemical weapons facilities, halt production, and hand over their stockpiles of chemical weapons to Russia.

President Obama stated, "The military has positioned assets in the region. We are prepared to strike whenever we choose, and I am prepared to give that order... We should have this debate because the issues are too big for business as usual. What message will we send if a dictator can gas hundreds of children in plain sight and pay no price?"

Last year, President Obama said that if Syria engaged in chemical warfare, they would be crossing a serious "red line." Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel stated, "This situation must not be allowed to continue [...] Now the whole world is watching. Iran is watching, and it wants to see what would be the reaction on the use of chemical weapons."

In his speech, Kerry said, "The primary question is really no longer 'What do we know?' The question is... 'What are we going to do about it?'"

(Sources: CNN, Huffington Post, NBC News, New York Times, CBS News)

Australian special forces mutilate Afghan insurgents

by Ruth Murai

People Editor

This past month, an Australian special forces team came under investigation after being accused of mutilating the bodies of Afghan insurgents. The hands were cut off of at least one insurgent and brought back to the Australian base at Tarin Kot.

Australian soldiers are required to collect the fingerprints of every member of the Taliban that is killed, and so the soldiers involved in the mutilation claimed that a superior officer gave them instructions to bring back the fingerprints at any cost. The mutilation or mistreatment of dead bodies is a violation of the laws of war, but some are arguing that the act may have been legal if cleared by officials at the highest levels.

Among those who are holding back judgement is Neil James from the Australian Defense Association, who said, "Without knowing the exact circumstances it's hard to comment. This would not necessarily be an illegal act."

In 2011, Australian soldiers were previously accused of body mutilation when there were claims that the corpse of an insurgent was stuffed into a taxi with the legs hanging out of the window. Even these allegations, however, are not nearly as severe as the uproar caused when a YouTube video of four U.S. marines urinating on the bodies of dead Afghan insurgents surfaced in 2012. Even after severe punishments though, one of the American soldiers claimed he would do the same thing. Over the course of the past few years, a multitude of new cases has surfaced.

The mutilation of corpses is strictly against the laws of war placed "to limit the effects of armed conflict for humanitarian reasons," according to the ICRC. Those who break the laws of war may be held accountable for war crimes.

Although the Australian military has not yet commented on the investigation, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has expressed his confidence in the Defense Force Chief to investigate.

(Sources: NBC, ABC, Huffington Post, ICRC)



ACCUSATIONS: Soldiers are under investigation for allegedly mutilating Afghan bodies.

Snowden leaks NSA intel

by Lauren Finkle

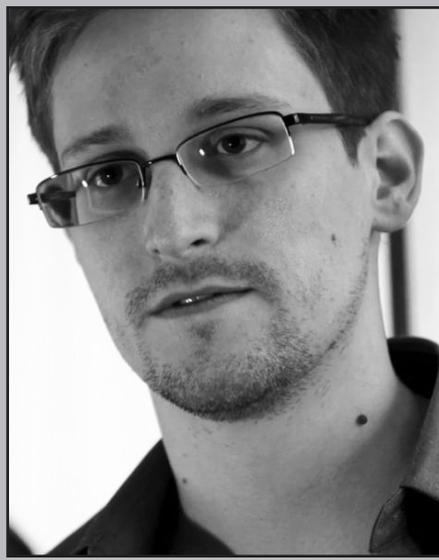
Web Editor

The story of rogue former CIA and NSA computer specialist Edward Snowden transfixed the nation when he leaked crucial documents to the The Guardian and The Washington Post in May of 2013.

While working at Booz Allen Hamilton, an American technology firm, Snowden used his computer expertise to amass documents from the supposedly-secure National Security Agency (NSA) server. They all related in some way to programs enacted by British and American governments to track phone metadata, as well as internet traffic leaving and entering their countries. Snowden released these documents to the aforementioned newspapers, then fled to Hong Kong and later to Moscow to escape the legal aftermath.

On June 14, the US convicted Snowden of espionage and theft of government property. Nevertheless, he was quickly granted asylum in Russia, after the US pressured Cuba not to allow Snowden to fly into Havana. He is currently residing in Russia in an undisclosed location.

Snowden has caused multiple quandaries for the US government. His stealthy invasion into the NSA server has weakened government claims that phone and internet tracking data is secure and can only be accessed by the appropriate staff. Furthermore, government officials are



LEAK: Edward Snowden leaked a multitude of secret documents.

still struggling to pinpoint how many documents Snowden stole and what could still be leaked. Lastly, Snowden's acceptance in Russia despite his indictment has strained Russo-American relations. All three issues threaten America with explosive consequences.

It remains to be seen how the government will conclude the Snowden scandal.

(Sources: CBS News, USA Today, NBC News)

Civil war devastates Egypt

by Niamh Doyle

Opinion Editor

Egypt was once again thrown into turmoil this summer as the first democratically elected Egyptian president, Mohamed Morsi, was removed from his position by the Egyptian military. This dramatic coup d'état followed anti-Morsi protests that swept the country in June and early July. Morsi supporters are rallying in the streets, leading to catastrophic clashes with the Egyptian provisional government.

The death toll from these violent protests rises even more as the violence intensifies. Civilians are fighting against the military, which stays adamant in its attempts to keep President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood out of power.

Meanwhile, the United States "strongly condemns the steps that have been taken by Egypt's interim government and security forces," said Obama. Despite the president's words, the United States is continuing to supply money and weaponry to the Egyptian military, even while the death toll of Egyptian civilians at the hand of martial forces rises above 1,000.

The world holds its breath as Egypt approaches a crossroads. Authorities and citizens alike speculate over when the violence will stop. Some believe that the United States' aid of the Egyptian military will support the authoritarianism that ruled over Egypt for nearly 60 years prior to 2011. Others are optimistic that July's coup d'état will lead to a second democratic election.

(Sources: CNN, BBC, Huffington Post)



all photos courtesy Wikimedia

COUP D'ETAT: Protestors removed Mohamed Morsi from power.