Syrian opposition and ISIS use chemical weapons

As the events of the past months have shown, a number of Western governments, primarily the US and Great Britain, have not left their attempts at politicization of the process of destroying chemical weapons (CW) in the Syrian Republic, by means of blaming certain participants of the process of breaching the conditions of liquidation of CW in the SAR. Recently, in an attempt to reawaken the idea of an armed intrusion into Syria, aiming at toppling existing authorities, the USA and a number of Western countries once again began accusing Syrian leaders of using chemical weapons in their fight against armed opposition. These very same militants, who have almost completely crossed over to the side of the "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" (ISIS), are still stubbornly called "moderate opposition" in Washington and London from where they receive not only financial, but also military assistance.

In order to understand the intricacies of Western propaganda and the tireless campaign for forceful overthrow of the government of Bashar Al-Assad, I would like to remind of several events, recognized by the world community and by the UN, related to the complete elimination of chemical weapons by the authorities of Damascus.

Washington has actively used cases of the use of chemical poisoning agents in the Syrian inter-civil war since 2011, as a basis for another military intervention in the Middle East and armed incursion in Syria. The chemical attack on the outskirts of Damascus, in Gute, on August 21, 2013, caused a direct threat of the resort to force against Syria by the USA and its allies. As the official representatives of Damascus and numerous foreign experts repeatedly pointed out, there was no direct evidence of the use of chemical weapons by Syrian authorities, but rather there were active ongoing attempts by the USA and its allies to unleash a propaganda campaign concerning this problem with the frequent use of direct provocation by Syrian opposition groups supported by the West. In 2013, the threat of military intervention in Syria was successfully averted as a result of an agreement between the USA and Russia on transferring the stock of Syrian CW under the international control.

After the UN Security Council adopted a resolution on the chemical weapons destruction in Syria in September, 2013, the international operation of transporting components and precursors of CW out of Syria was completed as early as the first half of 2014. The achievement of this unprecedented result was fully confirmed by the conclusions of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in December 2014. There cannot be two different opinions on the matter; the operation was a success, which is recognized by all the professionals involved in the work. Taking into account current state of affairs, it may be said that the Syrian chemical dossier is no longer a burning issue, and all future work in that direction should be done solely on a pragmatic and depoliticized basis, under the auspices of the OPCW and within the framework of its working agenda.

In addition, during 2014, in parallel with the mentioned activities of the Syrian authorities and international community, Syrian opposition regularly revived its activities, especially those units influenced by ISIS jihadists, with the goal of getting access to chemical weapons or their components. It is well known that the combatants of the "Islamic State" repeatedly used chlorine for practically terrorist goals in Iraq and Syria. There is some information indicating the seizure of chemical weapons storage facilities, in particular, "Al-Mutanna," in Iraq and "Ruvaga" in Libya. The consequences may be very tragic, which is why the facts of this kind should not be concealed, and they
should be adequately assessed by the OPCW and the UN.

On January 6, 2015 the OPCW fact-finding mission to investigate possible cases of the use of chlorine-containing substances as chemical weapons in Syria presented a report at the UN Security Council, confirming the continuation of the use of poisonous chlorine gas, in particular, in three Syrian villages in the provinces of Idlib and Hama in 2014. At the same time, the OPCW did not name direct perpetrators of these attacks, which was used by both London and Washington for bringing unwarranted accusations at Syria while keeping quiet about the true role of the Syrian opposition.

However, back in 2013, American journalist, human rights activist and Pulitzer Prize winner Seymour Myron Hersh underlined that the CIA informed the US government that the Islamic Al-Nosra insurgents possessed a chemical weapon, sarin gas.

In February 2014 a group of experts from the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MIT, under the direction of famous physicist, Theodor Postol, and former UN missile inspector, Richard Lloyd, confirmed in detailed reports that the missiles containing chemical weapons were launched in Syria from the territory controlled by the insurgents. However, despite the fact that the credibility of experts’ opinion on the participation of the Syrian opposition in the use of chemical weapons was acknowledged a lot of times, not just Washington and its allies, but also the UN did not accept them, which was a direct evidence of double standards in Western policy and of manipulating facts, pursuing one’s own interests.

Therefore, it is no surprise that in September 2014 there were more information about new cases of involvement of the Syrian opposition, acting alongside with ISIS terrorists, in repeated and massive use of chemical weapons.

There were, at least, three such cases noted by the central Iraqi authorities and the Kurdish regional authorities:

On September 15, 2014, chlorine gas was used against Iraqi police forces in Balad (in the central region of Iraq, on the territory of the Mouhafazat in Salah al-Din), 11 policeman ended up wounded;

On September 22, 2014, ISIS terrorists used chlorine gas in Al-Saklyauyya to the north of Fallujah, more than 300 soldiers were killed, as reported by the Anadolu agency with a reference to a statement from the parliamentary deputy of the Iraqi National Alliance, Ali el-Budeyri. Then, in the bastion of Kurdish resistance in Kobani, it was once again noted that chemical weapons had been used: after a bomb blast dozens of people complained of difficulty in breathing, skin and eye reactions characteristic of the exposure to toxic chlorine. Earlier, in June 2014, ISIS Islamists already launched a similar chemical attack against rural Aviyko, 12 km from Kobani.

Use of chemical weapons in Iraq was noted in December 2014 in the city of Hita, in the west of the country, in Baghdad district and in Anbar province.

On December 15, 2014, Damascus provided the OPCW with important data, according to which there were cases of capture by the insurgent opposition on Syrian territory of chlorine-containing substances storage facilities. Thus, there is a strong basis to suspect the involvement of the armed Syrian opposition insurgents, especially the so-called "Islamic State," in the use of poisonous substances for terrorist goals.

The cases mentioned illustrate that ISIS Islamists and the numerous Syrian oppositionists who joined them in 2014 chose the use of chemical weapons as their priority in Iraq and Syria, which results, among other things, in casualties among citizens. This is confirmed by the declaration from the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Syria, Faisal Mekdad at the meeting on December 1, 2014, with representatives of the OPCW, about the fact that during the civil war the Syrian government never used chemical weapons, but terrorist groups and armed Syrian opposition "used poisonous chlorine in a number of regions in Syria and Iraq." On their side, the officials of OPCW, while confirming the complete destruction of the chemical weapons by Syria, express concerns over the numerous remaining chemical weapons in the Middle East, mostly in Israel, and call upon that country to follow the example of Syria and destroy its CW.

However, following the double standards policy, Washington and its allies, who previously actively boosted the "world threat from Damascus’s CW" idea, today prefer to keep silence about the threat of the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian opposition and Islamists, in every possible way supporting the latter in their goal of overthrowing the existing authorities in Damascus.

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