

Sarajevo, 1995 and Damascus, 2013: The use of mass attack deception to decide wars

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Yossef Bodansky, Senior Editor, [GIS/Defense & Foreign Affairs](#)

In August 1995, Western governments, and particularly the Bill Clinton White House, were in great quandary.

The negotiations with the Serbs were going well as President Slobodan Milosevic was demonstrating unprecedented flexibility and accepting virtually all the demands put forward by the West.

Hence, it was becoming politically and legally impossible for the U.S.-led West to launch the NATO military intervention which President Clinton had promised Bosnia-Herzegovina leader Alija Izetbegovic the U.S. would launch in order to quickly win the war for the Bosnian-Muslims.

Then, on Aug. 28, 1995, at around 11:00 hrs local, a mortar shell appeared to hit the Markale market place in Sarajevo, killing 38 people and wounding another 90. Russian

Col. Andrei Demurenko, then the commander of UN Forces in Sarajevo, immediately rushed with an UNPROFOR team to the supposed Bosnian-Serb mortar positions and ascertained that none of them could have been used to fire the mortar rounds.

Demurenko's report stated that the Bosnian-Serb forces were falsely blamed for the attack on the Markale.

Nevertheless, ostensibly in response to the massacre, NATO launched the air campaign against Bosnian-Serb forces and shortly afterwards decided the war in favor of the Bosnian-Muslims.

On Aug. 31, 1995, Jean Daniel, then Editor of the magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur*, wrote an article titled "No more lies about Bosnia". In the article, Daniel recounted an exchange he had just had with French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur about the NATO air campaign



Bodies said to have been killed by nerve gas in the Ghouta area of Damascus, Aug. 21. /Reuters

and the motivations for it. "They [the Muslims] have committed this carnage on their own people?" Daniel asked. "Yes," confirmed Balladur without hesitation, "but at least they forced NATO to intervene."

The Aug. 21, 2013, chemical attack in Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus, might become the Markale of the Syrian war.

On Aug. 19, a UN expert delegation arrived in Damascus to study reports and evidence of earlier use of chemical weapons. The next day, they were presented with detailed scientific, technical, and military data about the alleged chemical attacks, soil contamination and why the Syrian Armed Forces could not have carried out these attacks.

Russian and other foreign experts who studied the data separately found it compelling.

The Syrian military also presented the UN team with detailed intelligence evidence about chemical weapons and production labs affiliated with the opposition discovered in Syria, Turkey and Iraq.

On Aug. 21, the Syrian opposition announced a massive chemical attack in Ghouta which allegedly inflicted about 1,300 fatalities including hundreds of children. As in previous chemical attacks blamed on the Assad administration, the attackers used the ubiquitous Sarin nerve gas. Immediately, the opposition flooded Western media with pictures of the dead, but provided no conclusive evidence about the attack and the perpetrators.

Moreover, initial opposition reports claimed the attack was conducted by a barrage of rockets. Subsequently, in the context of renewed outcries for a No Fly Zone, the opposition claimed that the chemical attack was a part of a massive bombing by the Syrian Air Force. Yet, the opposition's pictures show no casualties suffering shrapnel wounds associated with aerial bombing. Stern denials by the Syrian Government of any involvement in the attack were largely ignored by the West. At the time of writing, the UN expert delegation and foreign diplomats were denied access to the attack site by the opposition forces ostensibly because of fear for their safety.

The context of the attack is of great significance.

Starting Aug. 17 and 18, nominally Free Syrian Army (FSA) units — in reality a separate Syrian and Arab army trained and equipped by the CIA as well as Jordanian and other intelligence services — attempted to penetrate southern Syria from northern Jordan and start a march on Damascus. The U.S.-sponsored war plan was based on the Autumn 2011 march on Tripoli, Libya, by CIA-sponsored army from Tunisia which decided the Libyan war and empowered the Islamists.

Two units, one 250-strong and one 300-strong, crossed into Syria and began advancing parallel to the Golan Heights border. Their aim was to break east and reach Daraa quickly in order to prepare the ground for the declaration of Daraa as the capital of a "Free Syria". However, the CIA's FSA forces met fierce resistance by the unlikely coalition of the Syrian Army, local jihadist forces (mainly the locally-raised Yarmuk Brigades), and even tribal units who fear the encroachment by outside forces on their domain. By Aug. 19 and 20, the FSA units were surrounded in three villages not far from the Israeli border.

An attempt to use an Indian UNDOF patrol as human shield failed. The FSA commanders were now (ie: as of late Aug. 21) pleading for massive reinforcements and an air campaign to prevent their decimation.

Meanwhile, on Aug. 19, in Ghouta, more than 50 local opposition fighters and their commanders laid down their arms and switched sides. A few prominent local leaders widely associated with the opposition went on Syrian TV. They denounced the jihadists and their crimes against the local population, and stressed that the Assad administration was the real guardian of the people and their interests. More than a dozen ex-rebels joined the Syrian Government forces.

Hence, the last thing the Assad administration would do is commit atrocities against the Ghouta area and the local population which had just changed sides so dramatically. For the opposition, fiercely avenging such a betrayal and petrifying other would-be traitors is a must. Furthermore, in view of the failure of the march on Daraa and Damascus by the CIA's FSA forces, there was an urgent imperative for the opposition to provoke a Western military intervention before the rebellion collapsed completely, and Assad consolidated victory.

In Obama's Washington, there has been a growing opposition to intervention.

Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, who had just been to the Jordan and Israel on an inspection tour of the Syrian crisis, publicly doubted the expediency of an armed intervention, because supporting the opposition would not serve the U.S. national and security interests. Dempsey wrote to Congress that while the U.S. "can destroy the Syrian Air Force", such a step would "escalate and potentially further commit the United States to the conflict".

There was no compelling strategic reason for such an undertaking. "Syria today is not about choosing between two sides but rather about choosing one among many sides," Dempsey wrote. "It is my belief that the side we choose must be ready to promote their interests and ours when the balance shifts in their favor. Today, they are not."

However, President Obama's own inner-most circle has made it clear that it is committed to "humanitarian interventionism" of the kind exercised in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Libya.

Absent legitimate national interests, a U.S.-led intervention must be based on humanitarian

reasons such in retaliation to atrocities and chemical attacks.