

IT'S LIKE NO ONE NOTICED WHAT HAPPENED TO SADDAM AND QADDAFI

I'm just now catching up to the Joby Warrick "explanation" of the Syrian chemical weapons scare from two weeks ago. Particularly coming on the heels of the NYT's replay of its old Iraq Al cutout play (see Moon of Alabama on that), I expected to react to it as propaganda first and foremost.

But mostly, I think the story is an awful mess.

A very central part of the story is that no one ("Western" and "Middle Eastern" sources are cited) knows whether Syrians began to mix the chemicals because of an order of Bashar al-Assad or because a rogue officer ordered it.

Intelligence analysts said the orders to prepare the weapons were issued about two weeks ago. They said it was not clear whether the decision came from senior Syrian leaders, possibly including President Bashar al-Assad, or from a field commander acting on his own, the officials said.

Since concerns surfaced in the summer that Syria was moving chemical weapons among several sites across the country, officials in Damascus have repeatedly pledged not to use the banned munitions. After the warnings last week from Obama and other foreign leaders, the Syrian Foreign Ministry repeated that it would not use chemical weapons against the rebel forces.

Still, the discovery that steps had been taken to activate weapons at at least one military base alarmed intelligence officials, because of fears that a

single commander could unleash the deadly poisons without orders from higher up the chain of command.

In spite of this reported uncertainty, sources (including Leon Panetta, on the record) act like Assad “got the message.”

“We haven’t seen anything new indicating any aggressive steps to move forward in that way,” Panetta told reporters during a visit to Kuwait. Referring to Obama’s warning to Assad, the defense secretary said, “I like to believe he’s got the message.”

That would seem to indicate a belief, perhaps within the US, that Assad gave the order.

Nevertheless the possibility that a rogue officer might launch a CW attack allows Warrick’s sources to entertain the possibility that a rogue officer would use the weapons while Assad would not because the officer might believe he has nothing left to lose.

“Once you’ve used the weapons, you know the world is coming after you,” the official said. “But if you’re a general and you think you’re not going to survive this, you might not care.”

What?!?!?

The standard treatment by the US for vanquished dictators these days—given the recent history of Saddam and Qaddafi—is a sloppy, humiliating death. Is it really possible that all the anti-Assad intelligence agencies have failed to think through the implications of this? Assad, far more than a rogue General, would have to believe he wasn’t going to live.

Not to mention that the latter half of Warrick’s article suggests why CW would be hard to use effectively in a civil war, with rebels and the regime mixed in close proximity.

Now, for the record, someone (I forget who) floated the idea that if Assad were to use CW, he might be more interested in using them against Turkey, which is the launching pad for this war. None of Warrick's sources seem to consider that fairly out of the box suggestion. (There's always the possibility he'd use them as a threat against Israel).

But then there's the issue I brought up shortly after this happened. The CW mixing happened on November 28. The next day, Syria's Internet went down (something that goes unmentioned in Warrick's piece). I suggested in my earlier article that Western assertions that the outage had nothing to do with the CW mixing suggested we, not Assad, brought the Toobz down.

Whether we did or Assad did, though, you'd think this now central concern about rogue officers would have made the Internet outage a really fucking big deal, given that it would have disrupted the command and control that Western intelligence were purportedly already worried about. Nope! We had great visibility, we said.

Oh, did I mention that just after this went down Syria's Foreign Ministry (the folks who supposedly reassured us on the CW) spokesperson, Jihad Makdissi, defected? You think he might have something to say about the broken Toobz and the alleged CW prep? You think it's possible he was an asset getting out just after he had carried out two big ops for us, one an InfoOp, the other tactical?

Now, obviously the CW and the Scud missile allegations are designed to gin up a coalition of the willing (and persuade Russia and other members of the coalition of the unwilling) so we can go to war in Syria.

But their narrative is so problematic and dodgy I can't make sense of whether they really are that stupid or just their narrative is.