

# *U.S. State Department Admits Opposition in Syria Has Chemical Weapons*

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Moscow, October 23 (RHC)-- Russia's Defense Ministry stated that the U.S. State Department has admitted that Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a rebranded al-Qaida group in Syria, has and uses chemical weapons in Syria. "The Hayat Tahrir al-Sham terrorist group (HTS), linked to Jabhat al-Nusra, which uses 'small and heavy arms, improvised explosive devices, and chemical weapons', operates in that province [Idlib]. This is the first official recognition by the State Department not simply of the presence, but, I emphasize, the use of chemical weapons by Jabhat al-Nusra terrorists in that part of Syria to commit terrorist attacks, about which we repeatedly warned," Major General Igor Konashenkov, a spokesperson for the Russian Defense Ministry said.

The use of chemical weapons in Khan Sheikhoun, a town in Idlib province, was previously blamed on the Syrian government and used to justify the launch of 59 tomahawk missiles on a Syrian airbase by the United States. The official story surrounding the attacks in Khan Sheikhoun from the Russian Ministry of Defense follows that the Syrian air force bombed a weapons depot that contained stockpiled chemical weapons used by opposition forces that are heavily infiltrated by radical elements such as HTS.

Earlier in the conflict, an investigative report that followed the infamous 2013 East Ghouta chemical weapon attacks published in the London Review of Books suggested that top U.S. military and diplomatic officials under the administration of former U.S. President Barack Obama knew that opposition forces, including Jabhat al-Nusra, had the ability to produce and deploy chemical weapons since at least 2013.

The use of chemical weapons in Ghouta led the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad to comply with international calls to relinquish Syria's chemical weapon supplies. The U.S. State Department reported that this was a successful operation at the time of its completion in 2014.

The issue of chemical weapons in Syria remains a hot debate in the background surrounding the conflict at present, but Russian officials suggest that this admission by the U.S. State Department is a positive step forward.

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