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## Chemical Weapons Hypocrisy: WMD for We But Not For Thee

Thomas Knapp

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The French, British and Israeli governments have all accused Syria's regime of using chemical weapons in its ongoing struggle with foreign-backed rebels. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon is urging Assad to allow UN inspectors into the country to verify or disprove the claims. And US president Barack Obama, while carefully avoiding a direct accusation, has publicly mused that proof of the charge would be a "game-changer," by which he means that it would serve as an excuse to escalate US meddling in the conflict.

But the allegation rings hollow ... or at least hypocritical:

- The Israeli government openly used chemical weapons in the West Bank at least as recently as April 26.
- The French government gassed hundreds of protesters in Paris at least as recently as April 24.
- Chemical weapons are routinely used by US regime forces for purposes as unimportant as breaking up rowdy college parties. And if we want to expand our focus to more general weapons of mass destruction, the US remains the only country to ever use nuclear weapons on large civilian populations. I suppose we could also talk about white phosphorous and depleted uranium, but you get the picture.

- Both the US and the UK supply chemical weapons to repressive regimes around the world.

If it seems perverse to compare CS (“tear gas”), the particular chemical weapon used by all these regimes as described above, to GB (“sarin”), the agent they accuse Bashar al-Assad of using, consider, think again: CS is specifically designated as a chemical weapon, just as illegal for use in international warfare as GB, under the 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention.

The governments of France, the United Kingdom and the United States have signed and ratified that convention. Israel’s government has signed it, although it remains unratified by the Knesset. Yet all four governments freely and frequently use an illegal chemical weapon “on their own people,” the Israelis use it in foreign areas they militarily occupy, and the US and UK export it for use by other governments “on their own people” — all while condemning Syria’s government for allegedly exercising *exactly the same domestic/internal exemption*. Not that Syria needs such an exemption; it is one of five governments which has never signed or ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The definition of “chemical weapon” and “weapon of mass destruction” gets inflated or deflated as necessary to serve the purposes of a regime’s ruling class, both at home and abroad.

When a US drone fires a Hellfire II missile with an 8-pound fragmentation/anti-personnel warhead into a wedding party in Pakistan, that’s just cricket. When Dzhokhar Tsarnaev allegedly sets off two pressure cookers filled with black powder and ball bearings at the Boston Marathon, that’s “using a weapon of mass destruction.”

When the US government uses tanks to pump CS into an American church, sets the building on fire and machine-guns the fleeing residents, that’s “law enforcement.” When Bashar al-Assad allegedly uses sarin on armed opponents trying to overthrow him, that’s “murdering his own people.”

Why are governments so eager to make distinctions between types of weapons? Because those governments are otherwise so much alike as to be indistinguishable one from another.