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Syria's FM Walid Muallem: UK Helped White Helmets Smuggle Chlorine to Idlib

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The top official reiterated Damascus's determination to liberate the city at all costs.

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem said that British special services assisted terrorists of the Nusra Front group by smuggling canisters containing chemical weapons to several areas of Idlib — currently under control of the so-called White Helmet volunteer organization.

Speaking in a Saturday interview, Muallem claimed that the terrorists' plan was to use the canisters to stage a gas attack on civilians concurrent with an attack on Idlib and blame the Syrian government for the atrocity.

The operation to free Idlib from terrorists holding some three million people hostage within the city — labeled by CNN as the "world's largest open prison" — has reportedly been in the planning stages for months, according to PressTV. Following the liberation of Daraa in the south, Idlib remains the last holdout of the terrorists in Syria.

Syrian civil defence volunteers, known as the White Helmets, carry a body retrieved from the rubble following reported government airstrike on the Syrian

town of Ariha, in the northwestern province of Idlib, on February 27, 2017

A similar scenario involving chemical attacks earlier took place in Douma, near Damascus, and Khan Shekhun, near Idlib. In both cases, Damascus has been accused of using chemical weapons on its own civilians and in both cases the Syrian government has consistently denied involvement in the war crimes.

Last week, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said terrorists smuggled eight canisters of chlorine gas into a village southwest of Idlib. According to Konashenkov, a chemical attack would create a pretext for Western intervention in an Idlib operation.

In his interview, Muallem argued that false-flag attacks such as these serve the objective of Western governments including the US who maintain an illegal presence in Syria.

According to Muallem, there is clear evidence that the US continues to support terror groups including Daesh and the Nusra Front. The Syrian FM speculated that a false flag chemical attack could provide a pretext for an invasion of Syria by a coalition of US-led forces.

Syrian Ambassador to the United Nations Bashar al-Jaafari addresses the United Nations Security Council during a high level meeting on Syria at the United Nations in Manhattan, New York, U.S

The Syrian Foreign Minister said, however, that Damascus is determined to liberate Idlib of terrorism, noting that a humanitarian corridor was established at Abu al-Duhour airport to evacuate civilians before and during the operation.

Estimates of militant numbers in Idlib differ widely — from a United Nations claim of 10,000 to calculations claiming 70,000, according to CNN. The UN has observed that it is concerned that a full Idlib offensive will push some 2.5 million people over the Syrian-Turkish border, adding to an already dire refugee situation in the area, according to Turkish newspaper Hurriyet.

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