

Gaping Plot Holes In OPCW Report On Alleged Syrian Chemical Attack

By Caity Johnstone

Source: [Medium.com](https://medium.com)

The Courage Foundation, an international protection and advocacy group for whistleblowers, has published the findings of a panel it convened last week on the extremely suspicious behavior of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in its investigation of an alleged chemical attack in Douma, Syria last year. After hearing an extensive presentation from a member of the OPCW's Douma investigation team, the panel's members (including a world-renowned former OPCW Director General) report that they are "unanimous in expressing our alarm over unacceptable practices in the investigation of the alleged chemical attack in Douma, near the Syrian capital of Damascus on 7 April 2018."

I'll get to the panel and its findings in a moment, but first I should provide some historical background so that readers who aren't intimately familiar with this ongoing scandal can fully appreciate the significance of this new development.

In late March of last year, President Trump publicly stated that the US military would soon be withdrawing troops from Syria, causing some with an ear to the ground like independent US congressional candidate Steve Cox to predict that there would shortly be a false flag chemical weapons attack in that nation. This was because the public had already been shown that highly suspicious chemical attacks tended to happen when the Trump administration begins pushing for a reversal of standing US Syria policy, as I noted in April 2017 immediately following the alleged attack in Khan Shaykhun.

“I was able to predict Douma in 2018 because it happened already almost exactly 1 year prior, at Khan Shaykhun, April 4, 2017,” Cox told me on Twitter earlier today. “Khan Shaykhun also occurred within days of the Trump Admin saying we’re leaving Syria.”

And, like clockwork, on April 7 2018 dozens of civilians in Douma were killed in an incident which was quickly reported as a Syrian government chemical attack by all the usual establishment narrative managers on Syria, with everyone from the White Helmets to Charles Lister to Eliot Higgins to Julian Röpcke loudly flagging it on social media to draw the attention of mainstream news outlets who were slower to pick up the story.

There was immediate skepticism, partly because acclaimed journalists like Sy Hersh have been highlighting plot holes in the official story about chemical weapons in Syria since 2013, partly because Assad would stand nothing to gain and everything to lose by using a banned yet highly ineffective weapon in a battle he’d already essentially won in that region, and partly because the people controlling things on the ground in Douma were the Al Qaeda-linked extremist group Jaysh-al Islam and the incredibly shady narrative management operation known as the White Helmets. Those groups, unlike the Assad government, most certainly would stand everything to gain by staging a chemical attack in the desperate hope that it would draw NATO powers into attacking the Syrian government and perhaps saving their necks.

Long before any investigation into this suspicious incident could even be begun, much less completed, the US State Department declared it to have been a chemical weapons attack perpetrated by the Syrian government, saying “the Assad regime must be held accountable”, and that Russia “ultimately bears responsibility” for the attack. Which was of course mighty convenient for US geostrategic interests.

On the 14th of April 2018, the US, UK and France launched an

airstrike on the Syrian government as punishment for using chemical weapons, citing secret "intelligence" which the US government claimed gave them "very high confidence that Syria was responsible." The public has to this day never been permitted to see this intelligence. This all happened before any formal international investigation could take place.

The OPCW conducted their investigation, and in July 2018 published an interim report saying that "no organophosphorus nerve agents or their degradation products were detected, either in the environmental samples or in plasma samples from the alleged casualties." This ruled out sarin gas, invalidating earlier reports by Syria war pundits like Charles Lister who claimed that sarin had been used, but it didn't rule out chlorine gas. In March of this year the OPCW issued its final report saying forensics were consistent with chlorine gas use and advancing a ballistics report which strongly implicated the Assad government by implying it was an aerial drop (Syrian opposition militias have no air force). The official Twitter account for the UK Delegation to the OPCW tweeted at the time that the report "confirms chemical weapons used, demonstrating the vital importance of OPCW's work. This confirmed chlorine attack was only the latest example of Asad regime's CW attacks on its own population."

In May of this year, a leaked internal document from the OPCW investigation was published by the Working Group on Syria, Propaganda and Media which completely contradicts the findings of the official report published in March. The leaked Engineering Assessment said that "observations at the scene of the two locations, together with subsequent analysis, suggest there is a higher probability both cylinders were manually placed at those two locations rather than being delivered from aircraft," which would implicate the forces on the ground in the incident rather than the Assad government.

The OPCW indirectly confirmed the document's authenticity by telling the press that its release had been "unauthorised".

Climate Audit's Stephen McIntyre published an excellent thread breaking down how the document invalidates the OPCW's claims which you can read by clicking [here](#). Establishment narrative managers had a very difficult time spinning the fact that the OPCW had taken it upon itself to hide findings from the public which dissented from its official report on an incident which preceded an international act of war upon a sovereign nation, and all the implications that necessarily has for the legitimacy of the organization's other work.

Throughout this time, critical thinkers like myself have been aggressively smeared as deranged conspiracy theorists, war crimes deniers and genocide deniers for expressing skepticism of the establishment-authorized narrative on Douma. Which takes us to today.

The Courage Foundation panel who met with the OPCW whistleblower consists of former OPCW Director General José Bustani (whose highly successful peacemongering once saw the lives of his children threatened by John Bolton during the lead-up to the Iraq invasion in an attempt to remove him from his position), WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Kristinn Hrafnsson, Professor of International Law Richard Falk, former British Army Major General John Holmes, Dr Helmut Lohrer of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, German professor Dr Guenter Meyer of the Centre for Research on the Arab World, and former Deputy National Intelligence Officer for the Near East Elizabeth Murray of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity.

So these are not scrubs. These are not "conspiracy theorists" or "Russian propagandists". These are highly qualified and reputable professionals expressing deep concerns in the opaque and manipulative way the OPCW appears to have conducted its investigation into the Douma incident. Some highlights from their joint statement and analytical points are quoted below, with my own emphasis added in bold:

“Based on the whistleblower’s extensive presentation, including internal emails, text exchanges and suppressed draft reports, we are unanimous in expressing our alarm over unacceptable practices in the investigation of the alleged chemical attack in Douma, near the Syrian capital of Damascus on 7 April 2018. We became convinced by the testimony that key information about chemical analyses, toxicology consultations, ballistics studies, and witness testimonies was suppressed, ostensibly to favor a preordained conclusion.”

“The convincing evidence of irregular behaviour in the OPCW investigation of the alleged Douma chemical attack confirms doubts and suspicions I already had. I could make no sense of what I was reading in the international press. Even official reports of investigations seemed incoherent at best. The picture is certainly clearer now, although very disturbing.”

~ Bustani

“A critical analysis of the final report of the Douma investigation left the panel in little doubt that conclusions drawn from each of the key evidentiary pillars of the investigation (chemical analysis, toxicology, ballistics and witness testimonies,) are flawed and bear little relation to the facts.”

From the section on Chemical Analysis:

“The interpretation of the environmental analysis results is equally questionable. Many, if not all, of the so-called ‘smoking gun’ chlorinated organic chemicals claimed to be not naturally present in the environment’ (para 2.6) are in fact ubiquitous in the background, either naturally or anthropogenically (wood preservatives, chlorinated water supplies etc). The report, in fact, acknowledges this in Annex 4 para 7, even stating the importance of gathering control samples to measure the background for such chlorinated organic derivatives. Yet, no analysis results for these same control samples (Annex 5), which inspectors on the ground would have gone to great lengths to gather, were reported.”

“Although the report stresses the ‘levels’ of the chlorinated organic chemicals as a basis for its conclusions (para 2.6), it never mentions what those levels were – high, low, trace, sub-trace? Without providing data on the levels of these so-called ‘smoking-gun’ chemicals either for background or test samples, it is impossible to know if they were not simply due to background presence. In this regard, the panel is disturbed to learn that quantitative results for the levels of ‘smoking gun’ chemicals in specific samples were available to the investigators but this decisive information was withheld from the report.”

“The final report also acknowledges that the tell-tale chemicals supposedly indicating chlorine use, can also be generated by contact of samples with sodium hypochlorite, the principal ingredient of household bleaching agent (para 8.15). This game-changing hypothesis is, however, dismissed (and as it transpires, incorrectly) by stating no bleaching was observed at the site of investigation. (‘At both locations, there were no visible signs of a bleach agent or discoloration due to contact with a bleach agent’). The panel has been informed that no such observation was recorded during the on-site inspection and in any case dismissing the hypothesis simply by claiming the non-observation of discoloration in an already dusty and scorched environment seems tenuous and unscientific.”

From the section on Toxicology:

“The toxicological studies also reveal inconsistencies, incoherence and possible scientific irregularities. Consultations with toxicologists are reported to have taken place in September and October 2018 (para 8.87 and Annex 3), but no mention is made of what those same experts opined or concluded. Whilst the final toxicological assessment of the authors states ‘it is not possible to precisely link the cause of the signs and symptoms to a specific chemical’ (para 9.6) the report nonetheless concludes there were reasonable grounds

to believe chlorine gas was the chemical (used as a weapon).”

“More worrying is the fact that the panel viewed documented evidence that showed other toxicologists had been consulted in June 2018 prior to the release of the interim report. Expert opinions on that occasion were that the signs and symptoms observed in videos and from witness accounts were not consistent with exposure to molecular chlorine or any reactive-chlorine-containing chemical. Why no mention of this critical assessment, which contradicts that implied in the final report, was made is unclear and of concern.”

From the section on Ballistic Studies:

“One alternative ascribing the origin of the crater to an explosive device was considered briefly but, despite an almost identical crater (understood to have resulted from a mortar penetrating the roof) being observed on an adjacent rooftop, was dismissed because of ‘the absence of primary and secondary fragmentation characteristics’. In contrast, explosive fragmentation characteristics were noted in the leaked study.”

From the section titled “Exclusion of inspectors and attempts to obfuscate”:

“Contrary to what has been publicly stated by the Director General of the OPCW it was evident to the panel that many of the inspectors in the Douma investigation were not involved or consulted in the post-deployment phase or had any contribution to, or knowledge of the content of the final report until it was made public. The panel is particularly troubled by organisational efforts to obfuscate and prevent inspectors from raising legitimate concerns about possible malpractices surrounding the Douma investigation.”

[Caity Johnstone on twitter.](#)

Russian military police in Syria conduct patrol along new Turkish border route

Source: [RT](#)

Russian military police on Thursday carried out patrols on a new route along the Syrian-Turkish border, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

The length of the patrol route from Qamishli in northern Syria to the settlement of Amuda was more than 60 kilometers (about 38 miles), the statement said.

A Russian-Turkish memorandum was signed on Tuesday in Sochi after talks between presidents Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The document stipulates that Kurdish militias would be withdrawn to a distance of 30km (18.6 miles) from the border with Turkey to the west and east of Ankara's 'Operation Peace Spring' zone within 150 hours.

A Russian military police base on the outskirts of Kobani is located 2km (1.3 miles) away from the border with Turkey, TASS reported on Thursday. The previous day, the Russian military police were deployed in northeastern Syria.

Protests against Turkish

occupation in Tal Halaf village, Two civilians injured

Source: [SANA](#)

H. Zain / R.al-Jazaeri

Hasaka – Popular protests on Thursday were staged in the countryside in Ras al-Ayn city against the Turkish occupation forces which have prevented the locals from returning to their homes and their properties which have been looted by the terrorist groups which are mercenaries of the Turkish regime.

SANA reporter in Hasaka said that the locals of Tal Halaf village in Ras al-Ayn countryside took to the streets in protest and condemnation against preventing them from returning to their homes and properties which have been looted by terrorist groups affiliated to the Turkish regime forces.

Earlier, Local sources in Ras Al-Ayn said that the houses and properties of the locals in Ras al-Ayn were looted by the Turkish occupation forces and their mercenaries.

In a relevant context, the reporter added that two civilians were injured as the Turkish occupation forces opened fire on the locals of al-Mushrafeh village in the southern countryside of Ras al-Ayn.

Assad to Putin: We Reject

Turkish Aggression and Demographic Change

Source: [Syria News](#)

Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad told his Russian counterpart that Syria categorically rejects the Turkish aggression under any guise, in other words, a rejection to the Russian – Turkish agreement reached between Mr. Putin and the Turkish pariah Erdogan.

In a phone conversation between the two heads of states following the visit of the Turkish pariah Erdogan to Sochi, Mr. Putin conveyed to Dr. Assad Russia's agreement with the Turks on combatting 'all forms of terrorism' in Syria!

Turkish pariah Erdogan has flip-flopped countless times and failed for over a year to oblige his forces to meet his own commitments under the Astana Agreement (Idlib Agreement) to isolate Nusra Front terrorists from the other terrorist groups in the province, instead, the Turkish pariah strengthened the grip of the al-Qaeda Levant group over entrapped 3 million Syrians in Idlib.

Russian President has convinced the Turkish pariah to replace withdrawing US troops with Russian troops in the area which Trump granted in northeast Syria to establish a Turkish protectorate in. Mr. Putin sounds hopeful to be able to slowly remove Erdogan forces from northern Syria by time, a repeat to earlier bets on the Turks and the Kurds who instead took advantage of the Russian position to occupy more land and attempt to Israelize it.

However, Dr. Assad has stressed to Mr. Putin during the phone conversation Syria's rejection of all Turkish interventions, attempts to carve out Syrian territories under any form and to stop all forms of demographic changes to any areas by seeing

the displaced Syrians return to their homes.

The Turkish pariah wants to create a border province of up to 32 kilometers south of current Turkish borders inside Syria and to replace the people of this land with anti-Islamic Muslim Brotherhood Syrians with their families loyal to him. Syria has fought all these years against any of these attempts.

Mr. Putin taking Trump's shoes over the Turks thinks this would help solve the current crisis in Syria. It's the same mistake the West committed in our region for decades thinking the people of the Levant are attached to their land by a real estate contract that can be exchanged with other lands anywhere. This Russian Turkish agreement if it includes such swap of lands, similar to what Israel wants to do with the Palestinians, is doomed to fail and will only cause much more blood-shedding.

Dr. Assad conveyed this message to his Russian counterpart, SANA conveyed his words as follows: 'The President also stressed the return of residents to their regions to stop any previous attempts of any demographic change to which some sides tried to impose, affirming Syria's determination to combat terrorism and occupation in any span of the Syrian territories with all legitimate means.'

Dr. Assad told Mr. Putin that all blame for the current situation with the Turkish aggression and spread of terror is on 'those with separatist agendas' referring to the sellout Kurdish separatist groups once supported by Russia.

Russia's agreement with Turkey will give NATO useful idiot the separatist Kurds 150 hours to withdraw from the proposed zone Trump granted Turkey. Russian FM Lavrov stated that Russian Military forces will enter this region to oversee the SDF withdrawal starting today (October 23.)

In a complete breach of Syria's sovereignty which Dr. Assad

rejected, the Syrian authorities will not be allowed to enter the proposed Zone and will have to deploy border patrols along the southern borders with this proposed zone. Syria, as per all its officials, considers the respect to its sovereignty includes its ability to govern all regions within its borders, including the deployment of law enforces agencies, the Syrian Arab Army, and Damascus's control over municipal and local administration.

Taking advantage of current engagement of the Syrian Arab Army against NATO terrorists in Idlib and trying to change all of the above under any guise will only lengthen the chaos in the country, spill more blood, and cause endless conflicts in the future, which for sure the Russians wouldn't want to see but fail to realize, for now, not to mention that the Turks can never be trusted, let alone the reputation their current leader earned for just that.

Syria has no other viable option, meanwhile, other than to support popular resistance against Erdogan forces in the Trump Zone, while eliminating terror in Idlib then march northeast and eradicate Erdogan forces from there, bring back the Syrian displaced families to their towns and villages, and restore the country as it was pre-2011 until the complete liberation of the Golan and Iskandaron.

OPCW put lid on key evidence in Douma chemical incident – watchdog whistleblower

Source: [RT](#)

The international chemical weapons watchdog likely skewed its

own investigation of the 2018 chemical weapons incident in Douma, Syria to come to a predetermined decision, a damning conclusion based on whistleblower testimony said.

The April 2018 incident in the Damascus suburb was quickly blamed on the Syrian government by the West. Within days, the US, the UK and France launched barrages of cruise missiles in retaliation. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the international chemical weapons watchdog, later backed the justification, all but pointing the finger at Syria in its final report, which was released in March.

Now a panel of experts says the report was based on a flawed conclusion and likely deliberately steered toward the West-favored outcome. The accusation is based on evidence and testimony of an OPCW investigator, who came forward with damning evidence that his own organization had breached its mission.

After talking to the whistleblower and examining internal reports, text exchanges and other evidence, the panel was convinced that “key information about chemical analyses, toxicology consultations, ballistics studies, and witness testimonies was suppressed, ostensibly to favor a preordained conclusion,” it said in a statement.

The statement said the OPCW took effort to exclude dissenting investigators and silence their attempts to raise concerns about the report, which is “a right explicitly conferred on inspectors in the Chemical Weapons Convention.” The experts called on the organization to revisit its investigation and allow those not agreeing with the conclusion put in the final report to voice their concerns without fear of reprisal.

The panel convened by the Courage Foundation, which accepts donations for the legal defense of whistleblowers and journalists that report on leaks, includes several prominent specialists and public figures, including José Bustani, a Brazilian diplomat who served as the OPCW’s first Director

General before being strong-armed from the office by US superhawk John Bolton.

Bustani said the whistleblower confirmed his doubts about the report, which “seemed incoherent at best” right from the start.

“My hope is that the concerns expressed publicly by the Panel, in its joint consensus statement, will catalyze a process by which the Organization can be resurrected to become the independent and non-discriminatory body it used to be.”

The panel did not make public the name of the whistleblower or any previously unpublished evidence of the OPCW’s alleged misconduct. WikiLeaks, whose editor-in-chief Kristinn Hrafnsson was a member of the panel, re-printed a draft engineering assessment penned by an OPCW investigator, which was leaked in May. The document rejects the claim that chlorine cylinders, which were used for delivery of the toxic gas in Douma, had been dropped from the air, which was used as a key argument in accusing the Syrian army for the attack.

The OPCW did not challenge the authenticity of the document, but stood by its conclusions on the Douma incident.

Statement issued by the [Courage Foundation](#)

Panel Criticizes ‘Unacceptable Practices’ in the OPCW’s investigation of the Alleged Chemical Attack in Douma, Syria on April 7th 2018

The Courage Foundation convened a panel of concerned individuals from the fields of disarmament, international law, journalism, military operations, medicine and intelligence in Brussels on October 15th. The panel met with a member of the investigation team from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the international chemical watchdog. On this basis the panel issued the following statement:

Based on the whistleblower's extensive presentation, including internal emails, text exchanges and suppressed draft reports, we are unanimous in expressing our alarm over unacceptable practices in the investigation of the alleged chemical attack in Douma, near the Syrian capital of Damascus on 7 April 2018. We became convinced by the testimony that key information about chemical analyses, toxicology consultations, ballistics studies, and witness testimonies was suppressed, ostensibly to favor a preordained conclusion.

We have learned of disquieting efforts to exclude some inspectors from the investigation whilst thwarting their attempts to raise legitimate concerns, highlight irregular practices or even to express their differing observations and assessments –a right explicitly conferred on inspectors in the Chemical Weapons Convention, evidently with the intention of ensuring the independence and authoritativeness of inspection reports.

However belatedly, we therefore call on the OPCW to permit all inspectors who took part in the Douma investigation to come forward and report their differing observations in an appropriate forum of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, in fulfillment of the spirit of the Convention. They should be allowed to do this without fear of reprisal or even censure.

The panel advances these criticisms with the expectation that the OPCW will revisit its investigation of the Douma incident, with the purpose of clarifying what actually happened. This would help to restore the credibility of the OPCW and work towards demonstrating its legally mandated commitment to transparency, impartiality and independence. It is of utmost importance to restore trust in the verification procedures relied upon to implement the prohibitions of the CWC.

Panel members:

José Bustani, Ambassador of Brazil, first Director General of the OPCW and former Ambassador to the United Kingdom and France,

Richard Falk, Professor of International Law, Emeritus, Princeton University; Visiting Professor, Istinye University, Istanbul

Kristinn Hrafnsson, editor-in-chief, Wikileaks

John Holmes, Maj Gen (retd), DSO OBE MC

Dr. Helmut Lohrer, MD, Board member of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) and International Councilor of its German Affiliate

Prof. Dr. Guenter Meyer, Centre for Research on the Arab World (CERAW) at the University of Mainz

Elizabeth Murray, former Deputy National Intelligence Officer for the Near East, National Intelligence (retd); member, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity and Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence (website: www.samadamsaward.ch)

Hasaka: Turkish regime bombs Ras al-Ayn and Tal Abyad in Raqqa – children killed

Source: [SANA](#)

Hasaka -Turkish regime army launched on Wednesday an aggression on Ras al-Ayn city in the north-western countryside of Hasaka and on Tal Abyad in the northern countryside of Raqqa, SANA reporter said.

The reporter added that the Turkish regime forces launched an air and artillery intensive shelling on the Silos and

infrastructure in Ras al-Ayn city.

The aggression targeted sites for the separatist QSD militias in the villages of Mishrafa, Khirbet al-Banat, al-Asadyah, Ber Nouh, Alouk, Nastel, Azizyah, Azizyah school synchronizing with an artillery shelling that targeted Ayn Issa in Tal Abyad of Raqqa northern countryside.

Turkish regime forces concentrated on shelling the infrastructure, targeting electrical line of Allouk water station in Ras al-Ayn countryside which feeds Hasaka city and al-Mansoura dam in the surroundings of al-Malkiyah city that provides water to nearly 2 million people.

The Reporter added that the Turkish aggression expanded to target Tal Jahan, Ismailiah, Salihyah and Dirbasyah in Hasaka countryside.

Later, SANA reporter said three children and a woman martyred in a shell of Turkish aggression on a house in Bashiryah neighborhood in Qamishli.

Meanwhile, local sources said two civilians in Tal Diab were martyred while 4 children were injured near Dirbasyah to the west of Hasaka in the Turkish aggression.

QSD militias set fires to some oil wells in Hasaka northern countryside and set fires to tires in some parts of Ras al-Ayn neighborhoods, the reporter affirmed.