

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)