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Trump Walks Into Syria Trap Via Fake ‘Intelligence’

By Justin Raimondo
April 13, 2017

In the summer of 2013, the international media was aflame with reports that Syrian strongman Bashar al-Assad had murdered 1,400 civilians in the town of Ghouta: using deadly sarin gas, children, women, and men had been horribly slaughtered, and Syria’s Islamist opposition, in concert with the Washington foreign policy Establishment, was agitating for US intervention. It was the culmination of a years-long propaganda campaign, which then President Barack Obama had stubbornly resisted – and now, finally, he was about to give in and give the order for US missiles to fly. Yet, at the back of his mind, he still had unsettling doubts, and these were confirmed shortly before the day of the planned strikes when the Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, interrupted his daily presidential briefing, as Jeffrey Goldberg reported in *The Atlantic*:

“Obama was also unsettled by a surprise visit early in the week from James Clapper, his director of national intelligence, who interrupted the President’s Daily Brief, the threat report Obama receives each morning from Clapper’s analysts, to make clear that the intelligence on Syria’s use of sarin gas, while robust, was not a ‘slam dunk.’ He chose the term carefully. Clapper, the chief of an intelligence community traumatized by its failures in the run-up to the Iraq War, was not going to overpromise, in the manner of the onetime CIA director George Tenet, who famously guaranteed George W. Bush a ‘slam dunk’ in Iraq.

“While the Pentagon and the White House’s national-security apparatuses were still moving toward war (John Kerry told me he was expecting a strike the day after his speech), the president had come to believe that he was walking into a trap – one laid both by allies and by adversaries, and by conventional expectations of what an American president is supposed to do.”

Indeed, the “intelligence” assigning to Assad the responsibility for the sarin gas attack at Ghouta was very far from a slam-dunk: it was, in fact, a lie, a hoax, a false flag operation undertaken by the Islamist rebels and their Turkish allies who were desperate to draw the US into the Syrian civil war. Yes, sarin gas had been released at Ghouta, but, contrary to the “intelligence” provided to the President, it wasn’t the Syrian government that was responsible. As Seymour Hersh showed in a piece published in the *London Review of Books*, this was proved by “intercepted conversations in the immediate aftermath of the attack.” As one intelligence official told Hersh:

“Principal evidence came from the Turkish post-attack joy and backslapping in numerous intercepts. Operations are always so super-secret in the planning but that all flies out the window when it comes to crowing afterwards. There is no greater vulnerability than in the perpetrators claiming credit for success.’ Erdoğan’s problems in Syria would soon be over: ‘Off goes the gas and Obama will say red line and America is going to attack Syria, or at least that was the idea. But it did not work out that way.’”

While Hersh’s work was derided by the hot-for-war media, Goldberg’s later reporting confirmed it. (And, by the way, the *New York Times* is quietly backtracking from their earlier assertions). As Hersh told it, the generals went to Obama and told him that the intelligence justifying an attack would fall apart, and the President backed away from the trap that Trump is now walking right into.

The media narrative that the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad defied logic, military necessity, and common sense, and dropped a load of sarin on civilians near the town of Khan Shaykun, in Idlib province, is already falling apart. Theodore Postol, Professor Emeritus of Science, Technology, and National Security Policy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has analyzed the rather thin “evidence” provided by the US government in a letter to former CIA analyst Larry C. Johnson:

“I have reviewed the document carefully, and I believe it can be shown, without doubt, that the document does not provide any evidence whatsoever that the US government has concrete knowledge that the government of Syria was the source of the chemical attack in Khan Shaykhun, Syria at roughly 6 to 7 a.m. on April 4, 2017.

“In fact, a main piece of evidence that is cited in the document points to an attack that was executed by individuals on the ground, not from an aircraft, on the morning of April 4.

“This conclusion is based on an assumption made by the White House when it cited the source of the sarin release and the photographs of that source. My own assessment, is that the source was very likely tampered with or staged, so no serious conclusion could be made from the photographs cited by the White House.”

The essence of the US government's "evidence" pointing to Assad's forces as the perpetrators of the sarin gas attack is that the device – shown in photographs published in the report – was dropped by fixed wing aircraft, which only the Syrian government possesses. Yet Postol shows that "the most plausible conclusion is that the sarin was dispensed by an improvised dispersal device made from a 122 mm section of rocket tube filled with sarin and capped on both sides." The report "contains absolutely no evidence that this attack was the result of a munition being dropped from an aircraft. In fact, the report contains absolutely no evidence that would indicate who was the perpetrator of this atrocity."

Postol examines the alleged source of the attack: a crater on the road to the north of Khan Shaykun. He locates this crater, via Google Earth, and analyzes the photograph touted as the smoking gun.

"Assuming that there was no tampering of evidence at the crater, one can see what the White House is claiming as a dispenser of the nerve agent.

"The dispenser looks like a 122 mm pipe like that used in the manufacture of artillery rockets.

"As shown in the close-up of the pipe in the crater ... the pipe looks like it was originally sealed at the front end and the back end. Also of note is that the pipe is flattened into the crater, and also has a fractured seam that was created by the brittle failure of the metal skin when the pipe was suddenly crushed inward from above."

Instead of being dropped from a plane, the dispenser was simply placed on the ground and detonated by an explosive device, which then released the sarin gas on a day when weather conditions would ensure maximum lethality. As Postol explains:

"The explosive acted on the pipe as a blunt crushing mallet. It drove the pipe into the ground while at the same time creating the crater. Since the pipe was filled with sarin, which is an incompressible fluid, as the pipe was flattened the sarin acted on the walls and ends of the pipe causing a crack along the length of the pipe and also the failure of the cap on the back end. This mechanism of dispersal is essentially the same as hitting a toothpaste tube with a large mallet, which then results in the tube failing and the toothpaste being blown in many directions depending on the exact way the toothpaste skin ruptures.

"If this is in fact the mechanism used to disperse the sarin, this indicates that the sarin tube was placed on the ground by individuals on the ground and not dropped from an airplane."

Postol goes on to note that the same sort of obvious errors appeared in the 2013 US government report that claimed the Syrian government had bombed Ghouta with sarin gas. The rocket canisters that supposedly delivered the sarin gas to their target in Ghouta were far out of range of any Syrian government positions. The claim that we could have detected the rockets as they were launched and landed via satellite observation was also false, since there was no explosion when the rockets reached their target. "These errors," says Postol, "were clear indicators that the White House intelligence report had in part been fabricated and had not been vetted by competent intelligence experts."

Obama didn't walk into the trap: however, Trump appears to have fallen for this fake intelligence hook, line, and sinker. As Postol puts it:

“This same situation appears to be the case with the current White House intelligence report. No competent analyst would assume that the crater cited as the source of the sarin attack was unambiguously an indication that the munition came from an aircraft. No competent analyst would assume that the photograph of the carcass of the sarin canister was in fact a sarin canister. Any competent analyst would have had questions about whether the debris in the crater was staged or real. No competent analyst would miss the fact that the alleged sarin canister was forcefully crushed from above, rather than exploded by a munition within it. All of these highly amateurish mistakes indicate that this White House report, like the earlier Obama White House Report, was not properly vetted by the intelligence community as claimed.”

The same intelligence community that has been at war with Trump since before he took office, and has been trying to smear him as a tool of the Kremlin, has succeeded in pulling the wool over his eyes. And his previous extreme reluctance to involve the US in an effort to overthrow the Assad regime in Syria has been one of the chief motivating factors in their war on Trump. Having worked for years with the Syrian Islamist opposition, in close coordination with the Saudis and the Gulf emirates, the CIA was appalled when candidate Trump abjured “regime change” and declared that he would focus his efforts on eliminating ISIS in cooperation with the Russians. With the launching of those 59 missiles at Assad, however, and Trump's radical turnabout on the Russian question, the regime-changers at Langley can chalk up a victory.

Trump has walked right into a trap – and it's unlikely he'll ever get out. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's trip to Russia, where he proclaimed that “Assad must go,” was a dramatic demonstration of the trap snapping shut.

The silver lining in this dark cloud is that Trump's most vocal supporters are now thoroughly alienated from him, as he abandons his domestic agenda and is sucked into yet another useless war in the Middle East. Here's the lovely Ann Coulter railing against the “Strangelovian generals” who surround the formerly “awesome” Trump – and it's music to my ears. Here's Ryan James Girdusky of Red Alert Politics, a popular pro-Trump site, denouncing the Syria strike on Fox Business News. Here's Laura Ingraham citing Iraq war veterans' warning against entanglement in Syria. And the verdict from Lou Dobbs and Trump's many fans in the world of talk radio is a resounding no.

Trump, we are told by gloating NeverTrumpers, has no principles. But so what? His followers do, and they are now an army of dovish “deplorables” whom we are happy to welcome into the anti-interventionist movement. Many are now readers of – and contributors to – this site, and with the War Party on the march, we expect many more to follow in their wake.

The antiwar movement is no longer the preserve of coastal elites, Chomskyite professors, and obnoxious “social justice warriors,” who kept it marginalized, brain-dead, and impotent. The Trump phenomenon, and the subsequent betrayal by a President who was elected on the strength of his resolve to avoid the mistakes of the past, has introduced some much needed ideological

diversity into the ranks of anti-interventionists. As my mentor Murray Rothbard proclaimed way back in the early 1990s, “The Old Right is back!”

We may have lost the White House – but we’re about to take Flyover Country! And that is a cause for celebration.