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## ***The Douma Gas Attack: What's the Evidence It was a False Flag?***

On April 7, 2018, a chlorine chemical attack reportedly left 43 people dead in Douma, a city of over 100,000 people in the Ghouta region to the east of Damascus. I use the word reportedly since Assad and Putin both denied a day later that anybody had died. Propaganda networks for the two leaders called the grizzly video evidence for such an attack as a carefully staged performance akin to how some conspiracy theorists describe the Apollo moon landing. Among the outlets arguing for a “false flag” incident was One America News Network, an ardently pro-Trump cable news station that was granted a permanent seat in the White House’s news briefing room and whose White House Correspondent, Trey Yingst, was one of the top five most called upon reporters covering the Trump Administration. Not to be outdone, Fox News’s Tucker Carlson opined: “All the geniuses tell us that Assad killed those children, but do they really know that? Of course they don’t really know that. They’re making it up. They have no real idea what happened.”

Was this false flag supposed to provoke a “humanitarian intervention”? Consider what happened after Khan Shaykhoun was subjected to a sarin gas attack just about a year earlier. Donald Trump ordered the navy to fire Cruise missiles at Shayrat air force base in Syria but only after alerting the Russians about the impending attack. The runway was not damaged—something that was never even part of the plans—and jets and helicopters took off a few hours afterward. According to Wikipedia, even the Russian defense ministry said that the “combat effectiveness” of the attack was “extremely low” and that only 23 missiles out of 59 fired hit the base, destroying six aircraft. It did not know where

the other 36 landed. Russian television news, citing a Syrian source at the airfield, said that nine planes were destroyed by the strike but that they were inoperative at the time.

This time Trump did not even bother with a slap on the wrist over the Douma attack. In July 2017, Trump had cut off aid to Syrian rebels entirely. He also ordered a freeze on funding to the White Helmets, the first responder group that Vanessa Beeley and Max Blumenthal regard as part of a Salafist terror network. So, any concerns about a false flag incident triggering a major regime change operation in Syria could only be raised by people who are not persuaded by facts or logic.

On March 1, 2019, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) issued a report that concluded that a chlorine gas attack did take place but, as is customary in its investigations, did not place blame. Since it found evidence that two weaponized chlorine tanks penetrated a building from above, one might surmise that the regime was to blame, especially since it had been using chlorine bombs repeatedly in the past two years. Likely, the goal was not to kill people but to terrorize them. Chlorine gas can make you very sick in open spaces but generally will not kill you. It was the misfortune of the 43 people in a Douma tenement to be on the lower floors on April 7, 2018. They were trying to avoid conventional bombs, not a gas attack. When one of the tanks was detonated in a rooftop terrace, the chlorine gas seeped to the lower floors with a devastating effect. (Unlike most gases, chlorine is heavier than air and travels downward.)

The OPCW report went by without much attention since it did not lead to the kind of empty saber-rattling in Washington that typified sarin gas attacks in East Ghouta in 2013 or Khan Shaykhoun in 2017. Most people, either for or against Assad, had come to the realization by now that the war was over and that the likelihood of regime change could only be entertained by those people for whom time stands still.

One might certainly describe British academic Tim Hayward of falling into that category since he was largely responsible for a new wave of hysteria over a leaked report that supposedly proved that the Douma was a false flag. Unlike Assad and Putin's claim that nobody died that day, this time there was an acknowledgement that 43 people died but only because Salafists placed the chlorine tanks in the building with the intention of giving Donald Trump the excuse he needed to bomb Syria. Suffice it to say, Trump had other things on his mind at this point.

Hayward had been sent a leaked OPCW Engineering Assessment document written by one Ian Henderson, which in Hayward's words made the case that:

1. The conclusion of the Engineering Assessment is unequivocal: the "alternative hypothesis" that the cylinders were placed in position is "the only plausible explanation for observations at the scene".
2. These findings establish beyond reasonable doubt that the alleged chemical attack in Douma on 7 April 2018 was staged.

Henderson's findings boiled down to the impossibility of chlorine gas tanks making the holes in the roof seen in OPCW photos and by contrast the possibility of one of the tanks ending up on a bed (that tank did not detonate.) In a reply to Henderson's findings, the OPCW stated:

"With regard to the ballistics data collected by the FFM [fact-finding mission], they were analysed by three external experts commissioned by the FFM, and working independently from one another. In the end, while using different methods and instruments, they all reached the same conclusions that can be found in the FFM final report."

Naturally, people like Hayward, Beeley and Blumenthal would characterize this as just another thread in the conspiratorial web that has plotted to replace Assad with a Saudi proxy since 2011—notwithstanding the Saudi rapprochement with Syria that is now underway.

If the OPCW was a tool of American ambitions, it certainly has an odd history for a group. Among the four people serving on the committee overseeing such investigations is one José Bustani, a Brazilian diplomat who was at one time the director general of OPCW, the highest position in the organization until he was forced out. The circumstances of his removal cast doubt on his now being a servant of Donald Trump's foreign policy goals. In 2002, Bustani was negotiating with Iraq join the OPCW, thus allowing its inspectors full access to Iraq's purported "chemical weapons arsenal". If Bustani had succeeded, this would have impeded the Bush administration's war plans, by removing one of their "weapons of mass destruction" pretexts. When John Bolton got wind of Bustani's efforts, he demanded his resignation. In a phone conversation between the two men reported in The Intercept, Bolton is quoted:

“You have 24 hours to leave the organization, and if you don’t comply with this decision by Washington, we have ways to retaliate against you.” After a moment’s pause, Bolton specified the consequences of not resigning: “We know where your kids live. You have two sons in New York.”

If Hayward and company have trouble with the idea of a chlorine tank bouncing off the floor and landing on a bed, the scenario they put forward based on Henderson’s findings seems a thousand times more far-fetched. Since OPCW reports tend to bracket out broader political and social factors, let’s consider the likelihood of chlorine tanks being placed in the building by jihadists rather than dropped by helicopters.

To start with, they would have had to be placed there prior to the bombing attack that left 43 people huddling on the bottom floors to avoid a conventional weapon. This meant that men, likely strangers at that, would have had to enter the building prior to April 7, 2018 with sledgehammers and ladders to bust the holes in the two ceilings that the chlorine tanks would have had to penetrate. Since this building was likely a home to large families, the idea of bearded desperadoes behaving like they were part of a demolition crew does not appear plausible.

On top of that, a fully loaded chlorine tank weighs 300 pounds, about the same as a medium-sized refrigerator. Conveying such a heavy load up four flights of stairs prior to a bombing attack without being noticed is just as unlikely.

On top of that, the wreckage of the fractured ceilings is mixed with pieces of the metal harness that encloses the bomb as part of its weaponization. To scatter the shards of the carriage with plaster, etc. in order to make it appear as if they came from an aerial attack is just another part of the scenario that does not ring true, especially if it is happening on the same day of the attack.

Finally, the harness itself was not likely something that a jihadist would likely get his hands on in order to mount a false flag operation. It would require a skilled machinist to reproduce the metal parts that are part of the bomb’s harness as indicated in this photo.



Photo: [Amnesty International](#).

I say that as someone with diplomas in lathe and milling machines I received as part of an abortive mission to become an industrial worker 40 years ago when I was in the SWP.

Occam's razor states that when presented with competing hypotheses, one should select the one with the fewest assumptions. The notion that jihadi devils would have killed 43 people in a city that was a stronghold of poverty-stricken Sunni resistance to Assad for 7 years in the hope that the Muslim and poor-people hating President Trump would have come to their rescue is patently absurd, but no more so than the propaganda that has been cranked out by the Sputnik left up to this point in the sorry project of burnishing Bashar al-Assad's reputation during a savage war that has left his country a burning rubble.

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