

# US lashes out at Russia, as OPCW inspectors prepare to enter Douma

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The US and its allies have ramped up the propaganda war against Russia over Syria with unsubstantiated accusations that Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) inspectors were being blocked from entering Douma, the site of the alleged chemical weapon attack on April 7.

The Western claims are utterly hypocritical, given that the US, Britain and France carried out air strikes on targets in Syria on Saturday without waiting for the OPCW inspection team to conduct their inquiries. Moreover, none of the allies has provided any proof to justify unleashing more than 100 cruise missiles against Syrian targets.

US ambassador to the OPCW, Kenneth Ward, set the stage, declaring at an OPCW meeting in The Hague: “It is our understanding the Russians may have visited the attack site. We are concerned they may have tampered with it with the intent of thwarting the efforts of the OPCW fact-finding mission to conduct an effective investigation.”

In a tweet to the media on Sunday, the British delegation complained that “Russia and Syria have not yet allowed access to Douma,” insisting “unfettered access essential” and demanding “Russia & Syria must co-operate.”

Russia rejected claims of tampering with evidence. “Tomorrow [Tuesday] the security services with the United Nations ... will test the routes [into Douma]. And on Wednesday is when we plan the arrival of OPCW,” a senior Russian official said in The Hague yesterday.

The governments and media that propagated a deluge of unsubstantiated claims of a chemical weapons attack in Douma as proven fact, to justify an illegal attack on Syria, are now seeking to cover their tracks. A new round of lies and evasions is being prepared in the event that the OPCW inspectors find no evidence of

chemical weapons being used.

The *Washington Post*, for instance, declared: “The suspicions of tampering heightened concerns that the truth about the suspected April 7 attack may never be known.” The article made no effort to explain the obvious contradiction: if the truth may never be known, what was the basis for the US-led attack on Syria?

Last weekend, the US, France and Britain, backed by five other countries, voted down a Russian resolution in the UN Security Council condemning the missile strikes on Syria and calling for an immediate halt to “aggression” and “any further use of force.” The vote was deeply divided, with China and Bolivia voting for the resolution and four countries abstaining.

US ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley provoked a bitter Russian response when she declared in a CBS interview on Sunday that the US was about to impose more sanctions on Russian firms doing business in Syria. The White House later declared that, while additional sanctions were under consideration, a decision was yet to be made.

In The Hague, Alexander Shulgin, Russia’s representative to the OPCW, slammed Western claims, saying: “Not a single witness or affected patient in hospital has been found. Nor any traces of chemical ammunition have been identified. Instead, we managed to find those who participated in filming the faked video, which was eventually presented as ‘proof’ of a chemical attack.”

The *Washington Post* acknowledged that 13 medical workers, including nine doctors, had appeared on Syrian government television to explain that “the patients were suffering from asthma, not the effects of a poison gas” and that people were hosed down with water when someone in the room shouted “chemicals, chemicals.” But it dismissed the report, citing claims by

pro-US Islamist “activists” that the statements were coerced.

An on-the-spot report in the *Independent* by veteran Middle East journalist Robert Fisk lends further credibility to Russia’s claims. He visited Douma yesterday with a group of journalists and was able to walk about the town freely. He noted that he talked to many people “amid the ruins of the town who said they ‘never believed in’ gas stories—which were usually put about, they claimed, by the armed Islamist groups.”

Fisk reported the comments of Dr Assim Rahaibani, from the clinic where the “gas” videotape was made that has been replayed endlessly in the Western media as “proof” of a chemical attack. While not present at the time, Rahaibani explained:

“I was with my family in the basement of my home three hundred metres from here on the night but all the doctors know what happened. There was a lot of shelling and aircraft were always over Douma at night—but on this night, there was wind and huge dust clouds began to come into the basements and cellars where people lived.

“People began to arrive here suffering hypoxia, oxygen loss. Then someone at the door, a ‘White Helmet,’ shouted ‘Gas,’ and a panic began. People started throwing water over each other. Yes, the video was filmed here, it is genuine, but what you see are people suffering from hypoxia—not gas poisoning.”

As Fisk noted, the White Helmets—medical first responders partly funded by the British Foreign Office—are part of the pro-Western Islamist militias that left Douma in a convoy for northern Syria. Their motive for staging an attack is obvious—to create a pretext for a stepped up US-led military intervention against the Syrian government of President Bashir al-Assad.

In the deluge of propaganda in the Western media, no one has suggested any possible motive for the Syrian government to conduct a chemical attack—right at the point when its troops were about to retake Douma. Logic is replaced by the relentless demonisation of the Assad regime and its Russian and Iranian backers.

The dangerous and volatile situation in Syria was further highlighted by unconfirmed reports today of missiles fired toward the Shay’rat airbase to the southeast of the Syrian city of Homs in the early hours of the morning. The Pentagon denied any involvement

and the Syrian media accused Israel. The danger is that a minor incident can become the basis for a dramatic escalation of the confrontation between the US and Russia that could lead to conflict between the two nuclear-armed powers.



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