

# Leaked OPCW engineering report concludes alleged 2018 chemical attack in Syria was staged

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Last year, the Working Group on Syria, Propaganda and Media (WGSPM) research group reported on alleged chemical attacks in Douma last year and elsewhere during the US-led proxy war for regime change in Syria.

Authors Paul McKeigue, David Miller and Piers Robinson have now examined a leaked engineering sub-report from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) confirming their exposure of propaganda concocted to support the war.

Taken together the findings “establish beyond reasonable doubt that the alleged chemical attack in Douma on April 7, 2018 was staged.” WGSPM conclude that staging this incident “entailed mass murder of at least 35 civilians to provide the bodies” at one of the locations.

The WGSPM report is made all the more urgent by Washington’s renewal of its threats of military aggression against Syria on the basis of fresh unsubstantiated charges of chemical weapon use just last week.

The WGSPM’s original report noted that the OPCW’s Fact-Finding Mission in Douma only sought engineering assessments into the trajectory and damage to the gas cylinders found at two locations in October 2018. WGSPM noted the “obvious anomaly” that the OPCW did not explain why this was not sought six months earlier, immediately after the April 7 incident, when experts could have inspected the sites with the cylinders in situ. Instead they had relied on “images and measurements obtained by others,” long after the cylinders had been removed.

OPCW staff members then contacted WGSPM to inform them that an engineering sub-team had in fact investigated in April-May 2018. Onsite inspections were followed by modelling analysis in two European universities. This investigation was excluded from the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) final report, which cited only the assessments by unidentified “engineering experts” sought in October 2018.

Claims of the use of chemical weaponry by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s government have been made repeatedly to justify US-NATO military interventions. Many claims have involved the White Helmets, set up in 2013 as a proxy of the UK and US governments to provide logistical support and propaganda for Western-backed “rebels.”

At Douma, the White Helmets filmed themselves shouting “gas”

and hosing down children with water at a hospital. This fabricated incident was used to justify a missile launch by US, British and French forces. Residents and doctors who came forward to say there had been no attack were dismissed by the Western press.

The Douma allegations centred on the hospital incident and photographs of apartment buildings. At one location 35 victims were seen with a gas cylinder lying over a hole in the roof. Another photograph showed an apartment with a hole in the roof and a gas cylinder lying on a bed.

The WGSPM report rejected claims that nerve agents were used at Douma in April 2018. Investigating the use of unverified secondary sources for claims of other alleged chlorine attacks, WGSPM showed that these came from groups associated with only one side in the conflict. It criticised the OPCW report for failing to assess other hypotheses.

The engineering analysis in the final report, for example, said the unidentified experts had been asked to assess the “trajectory” of the two cylinders found.

This implies, WGSPM explain, that they were “not asked to assess whether the holes in the roof and the positions of the cylinders could be accounted for by anything other than the cylinders being dropped from the sky.”

The leaked engineering report reveals that the earlier assessment did consider other scenarios.

At the site dubbed Location 4 in the report there were three possibilities for the cylinder lying on the bed:

(i) It was dropped from an aircraft, pierced the roof, fell through the hole it had created, and bounced on its side to end up on the bed, its valve intact.

(ii) It was dropped, creating a hole, landed on the floor and was subsequently placed on the bed.

(iii) It was placed on the bed, and the hole in the roof was created by unspecified means before or after the placement.

At the site dubbed Location 2, where the cylinder was lying on a roof terrace over a hole, two possibilities were advanced:

(i) The cylinder containing chlorine was dropped from a plane, piercing the roof to form the hole, and its valve was pierced by the impact, releasing the chlorine.

(ii) The cylinder was placed alongside an existing hole.

At Location 4, the cylinder showed damage to its fins. Analysis showed the cylinder could not have fitted through the hole in the

roof with its valve intact and fins attached. It was not possible to establish how the cylinder could have fitted through the hole with its valve intact after the damage to its fins, and how the fins could have been damaged like this.

At Location 2, analysis showed that the concrete could not have stopped the cylinder falling at the required angle from a height of at least 500 metres. The cylinder's front showed no signs of interaction with the concrete.

The cylinder could have been stopped by steel reinforcing bars in the concrete, but this would have left indents which were not present. Impact alone could not have bent the bars to their angle away from the impact location, which was more consistent with an explosive blast. The engineering report said these factors "point to the conclusion that the alleged impact event or events leading to observed vessel deformation and concrete damage were not compatible."

Assessment of the crater's appearance suggested it was more consistent with a mortar or artillery blast than impact from a falling object. Similar craters were found in concrete on nearby buildings.

A mangled steel frame and fins were found on the terrace, but these were not consistent with the cylinder's appearance. The cylinder showed no signs of having been fitted with such a frame, nor of the frame having been stripped from it by impact.

The engineering report summarized:

"The dimensions, characteristics and appearance of the cylinders, and the surrounding scene of the incidents, were inconsistent with what would have been expected in the case of either cylinder being delivered from an aircraft. In each case the alternative hypothesis produced the only plausible explanation for observations at the scene."

This "alternative hypothesis" is that the cylinders were put there manually.

Many of the anomalies noted in the engineering report had been identified by WGSPM members from open source images. Last year WGSPM noted two points. The staging of the hospital scene is no longer in dispute, thanks to eyewitness and video evidence, as well as the 100 percent fatality rate, with no attempt at escape, which is inconsistent with recorded chlorine attacks.

With the leak of the engineering report, WGSPM write, "these findings establish beyond reasonable doubt that the alleged chemical attack in Douma on 7 April 2018 was staged."

This leaves the question of how and where the victims at Location 2 died. Images show evidence of exposure to irritant gas, although there is no indication of any attempt to escape. There also appears to have been 100 percent fatality, unlike in other irritant gas attacks. Considering this alongside examination of the images "leaves little doubt that the victims were murdered as captives."

The conclusion is that staging the Douma incident "entailed mass murder of at least 35 civilians." It follows that "people dressed as White Helmets and endorsed by the leadership of that organization" played the key role in the murder.

WGSPM point out that Douma was the first alleged chemical attack to which OPCW investigators had unimpeded onsite inspection access. They earlier drew attention to the political character and provenance of the third-party witnesses who

provided the information driving their conclusions, including the White Helmets.

This points to the OPCW being not merely compromised, but "hijacked at the top by France, UK and the US."

Covering up evidence about Douma is more than misconduct, WGSPM note, OPCW staff who "have suppressed the evidence of staging are, unwittingly or otherwise, colluding with mass murder."

The OPCW has denied that the report's signatory, Ian Henderson, was ever a member of the FFM. Henderson, an OPCW-trained inspection team leader, was assigned to lead the investigation at Locations 2 and 4.

The OPCW has suggested the engineering report was not part of the FFM investigation. WGSPM, observing that external collaboration and consultation "could not have gone ahead unless ... authorised," are "confident that the preparation of the report had received the necessary authorisation within OPCW. What happened after the report was written is another matter."

For their work investigating and exposing pro-war propaganda the WGSPM group has been subjected to ongoing press vilification.

Last month *Huffington Post* published a scurrilous attack on Professor Piers Robinson, who recently left Sheffield University. Robinson has been smeared as "engaging in denial" of anti-Semitism allegations in the Labour Party for saying he believed "the problem has been exaggerated for political purposes" in the furore over the cancelled Sheffield University meeting by MP Chris Williamson.

*Huffington Post* quoted an anonymous Syrian PhD student at Sheffield who was "relieved" Robinson was "not associated with the uni." The student's political position was clear: Robinson was "going to promote Assad anyway... so he is still dangerous in the sense that he's promoting a criminal." The student insisted, "The ideas that he was promoting are untrue and they can't be verified and are misleading ideas."

This incoherent kettle logic is all the more remarkable because what has attracted media ire is precisely Robinson's insistence on testing and verifying patently untrue propaganda claims.

*The author also recommends:*

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[23 May 2019]

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