



OPCW, Douma and the Post Truth World

by

James O'Neill

on

[New Eastern Outlook](#)



The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) came into effect on 29 April 1997. 193 Member States of the United Nations have ratified it. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is the United Nations body charged with the task of monitoring compliance with the CWC. It is based in The Hague. Among its powers are the powers to investigate allegations of the use of chemical weapons, and (since June 2018) the power to assign blame.

The investigations are carried out by a Fact Finding Mission, which comprises a team of experts from the relevant scientific disciplines. Additional technical assistance is frequently sought from bodies external to the OPCW, typically university departments.

The use of chemical weapons, apart from being banned under the CWC, can constitute war crimes and/or crimes under the civil jurisdiction of the country where they are used. As with any forensic examination of a crime scene, the integrity of the investigation process and any conclusions reached must accord with the highest standards of professional practice.

The work of the OPCW has had a high profile in the past two years because of three well-publicized

incidents. The first of these was the alleged use of sarin gas in the Syrian town of Khan Shaykun on 4th of April 2017.

Less than one week after the alleged attack, the United States government released his own intelligence report in which they expressed their "confidence" that the Syrian 'regime' had used sarin against its own people. On this unsourced and uninvestigated, much less forensically examined incident, the United States launched a barrage of cruise missiles against Syrian targets. That this response was itself a gross violation of international law was barely considered by the mainstream media at the time, so content were (and are) they in demonizing the Syrian government and in particular its President Bashar al Assad.

The OPCW report of the incident was no better than the US intelligence estimate. Without having visited the site, and without meeting minimum forensic standards such as determining a proper chain of custody, the OPCW in its October 2017 report nonetheless attributed the release of sarin gas to the Syrian government.

The second incident to receive wide publicity, expressions of outrage from western governments and large-scale expulsion of Russian diplomats, was the alleged nerve agent attack on Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury, United Kingdom, in March 2018.

The UK government, again before any scientific investigation and a proper conclusion could be reached, announced in parliament the first of its many versions or what they alleged had happened. The manifold absurdities of the U.K. Governments explanation as to what happened to the Skripals is outside the scope of this article. They are usefully summarised by British researcher [Rob Slane](#).

In the Salisbury case, the OPCW investigators arrived at the scene nearly three weeks after the incident and then produced a report that is a masterpiece of obfuscation. Without actually rebutting the UK government's version, they also failed to confirm it. They would only refer to the "toxic chemical compound which displays the properties of a nerve agent" as being found in the biomedical and environmental samples provided to them by the UK government.

One clue as to the reason for this caution is that the samples analysed by the OPCW were said to be of "high purity", something that is literally impossible if examined weeks after the event. As with Khan Shaykun, evidence and logic did not feature in the responses of either the western governments who expelled Russian diplomats, or the western mainstream media that blamed the Russians. Then as now, the official government version is the least likely scenario of several possible versions.

Had the OPCW properly investigated the incident, and perhaps more importantly released the full details of its investigation, including the real cause of the Skripal's illness, the Russian blame game would not have travelled the distance that it has.

Only a month after the Salisbury events, and perhaps coincidentally, there was another alleged chemical attack by the Syrian government on civilians in the city of Douma.

Douma was an area held by the Al Qaeda linked terrorist group, Jaysh-al-Islam. The Syrian army was on the verge of recapturing the city. Jaysh-al-Islam had a powerful motive to try and enlist the support of the US led "Coalition" that has been illegally occupying Syrian territory since 2015. Australia is a member of that coalition, and the only justification given for that participation (by then Foreign Minister Julie Bishop in November 2015) is simply nonsense from the viewpoint of international law.

At the time of the alleged attack, the western media were full of images of dead persons including children, the claimed activities of the so-called humanitarian White Helmets personnel, and pictures of two cylindrical objects purportedly used to spread the chemical agents that caused the death of the pictured victims.

The OPCW team began its on-site investigations in April-May 2018. It obtained expert assistance

from two European universities as well as its own internal experts. The final report was issued on 1st of March 2019, long after western media and politicians had not only taken the view that the Syrian government was responsible, but that it ought to be punished. Part of that response was a missile attack by United States, United Kingdom and French forces long before the OPCW team had commenced, let alone concluded, their investigation. As with the Khan Shaykun missile attack a year earlier, this latest attack was also a breach of international law.

What the OPCW report failed to disclose were the conclusions of an internal report by its own experts of their assessment as to what had actually happened. That suppressed report has now been leaked. Its findings are devastating, not only to the credibility of the OPCW, already damaged by the Khan Shaykun and Salisbury reports, but also to the credibility of the western mainstream media and western politicians.

Both of these groups had sought to blame the Syrian government and its principal backers, Russia Iran and Hezbollah, in the most extreme terms, and utterly without regard to the most basic principles of international law, forensic methodology, and the need to establish an evidential foundation before taking precipitate action which in this case could have had catastrophic consequences.

The suppressed report was signed by Ian Henderson, a senior OPCW staffer since 1998. Dr Henderson's team applied the laws of physics and engineering to the results of their empirical observations. A detailed analysis of the Henderson report can be found in Paul McKeigue et al [Briefing Note on the Final Report of the OPCW Fact-finding Mission on the Alleged Chemical Attack in Douma in April 2018](#).

The OPCW team led by Dr Henderson inspected the locations where the aforementioned cylinders were found (and widely photographed) as well as the alleged associated damage to the buildings. They concluded that the dimensions, characteristics and appearance of the cylinders and the surrounding scenes were inconsistent with those cylinders having been dropped from an aircraft. That they were manually placed where they were photographed "is the only plausible explanation for observations at the scene".

McKeigue et al referred to the findings set out in their earlier Briefing Note and concluded "these findings, taken together, establish beyond reasonable doubt that the alleged chemical attack in Douma on 7 April 2018 was staged".

Those conclusions raised a number of obvious questions. The first is, how did the victims, so graphically displayed, actually die? The forensic evidence clearly shows that these victims were undoubtedly hung upside down, their eyes blindfolded, and then murdered with exposure to a toxic chemical. Their bodies were then transported to the location where they were photographed, to form the pictorial backdrop to the allegations of a chemical attack by Syrian government forces.

The terrorists were the only ones with the means, motive and opportunity to murder these victims and then arrange the scenes for their propaganda purposes. It is an irresistible inference that in these staged scenes they were aided and abetted by the White Helmets. Far from being a neutral humanitarian group, the White Helmets, trained by the British, are not part of the solution; they are part of the problem.

The second question Dr Henderson's report raises is in two parts: why did the OPCW suppress this report and not include its findings in the OPCW final report released in March 2019; and why have the western media, including Australia, completely failed to report both the fact of the suppression of the crucial evidence in Dr Henderson's report, and the substance of the fact-finding missions conclusions?

It is a measure of the disgraceful state that the western mainstream media have fallen into, that they refuse to report, much less analyse, vital information that could easily have led to a major war between the United States and its allies (including Australia) and Russia.



At the time that the United States, United Kingdom and France were announcing their intention to attack Syria in retaliation for the Douma incident, the Russian military warned that if the missiles targeted their serviceman they would not only destroy the missiles but the carriers from which they were fired. There is no doubting their capacity to do so (Martyanov Losing Military Supremacy 2018). A full-scale war could easily have eventuated.

The final point is that any future OPCW reports must inevitably be treated with a degree of skepticism. The international community, and undoubtedly the overwhelming majority of the member states that signed the CWC are concerned that such an important body has been compromised in this way. It is not too difficult to infer that political pressure had been applied to all three of the investigations noted here.

It is too much to expect that are mainstream media and the politicians will issue a mea culpa after this latest exposure of their duplicity and sacrifice of principle and probity in pursuit of US geopolitical aims. Perhaps in the future however, they will be less quick to condemn and take actions that could so very easily lead to another war based on lies and imperial hubris.