

**REPORT ON THE HOUSE OF COMMONS PRESENTATION  
CONCERNING OPCW LEAKS ABOUT DOUMA**

**'Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons [OPCW] Leaks Reveal the  
International Community was Misled with Regard to the Alleged Chemical Weapons  
Incident in Douma, Syria, 2018'**

**Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2020, 3-5 pm**

The Thatcher Room, Portcullis House, Westminster, London, UK

**Organiser**

Sheila Coombes

Founder of Independent Anti-War Group Frome Stop War

**Chair**

John Holmes

Major General, rtd., DSO, OBE, MC

## CONTENTS

Introduction	1
List of Speakers	2
Transcripts of Presentations:	2
• John Holmes	2
• David Miller	2
• Piers Robinson	5
• Jonathan Steele	14
• Paul McKiegue	16
Question and Answer Session	28
Closing Remarks	35

## INTRODUCTION

This report by Dr. Catherine Brown (@neolawrencian), who attended the event, is based on her transcription (as near to verbatim as possible) of the presentations, questions, and answers as they were given. Speakers and questioners were then given the opportunity to clarify their statements post facto. It should be noted that Professor Paul McKeigue's presentation in particular has been expanded to reproduce the full text of the Powerpoint presentation from which he was speaking. The hyperlinks have been largely sourced by the report-compiler, whose editorial text insertions are indicated by square brackets.

It was written at the invitation of the event's organiser, Sheila Coombes, and has been approved by her and by the speakers.

Some readers may find the images of dead bodies that appear below distressing.

The views expressed are the speakers' own.

## LIST OF SPEAKERS

John Holmes	(Major General, rtd.)
Paul McKeigue	(Professor of Epidemiology, University of Edinburgh)
David Miller	(Professor of Political Sociology, University of Bristol, @Tracking_Power)
Piers Robinson	(Doctor, Co-Director of the Organisation for Propaganda Studies and Convenor of the Working Group on Syria, Propaganda and Media [WGSPM], former Chair/Professor University of Sheffield and former Senior Lecturer University of Manchester, @PiersRobinson1)
Jonathan Steele	(Independent journalist, formerly chief foreign correspondent for The Guardian, @SteeleJourno)

## TRANSCRIPTS OF PRESENTATIONS

### JOHN HOLMES (Chair)

For 34 years, I was in the British army and, as an ex-soldier, I have a vested interest in the impartiality, independence and transparency of the OPCW. I was invited to be one of the five people on the [Courage Foundation](#)<sup>1</sup> panel [which met in Brussels in [October 2019](#)<sup>2</sup>] to listen to the original whistleblower on the subject.

I come at this not from a political standpoint, but in the belief that the OPCW must look at how it governs itself, to try to prevent something like this from happening again.

I think that this is the first comprehensive and public presentation on why the OPCW Report into the alleged chemical attack at Douma was both seriously flawed and misleading, and I hope that you will find our arguments convincing.

### DAVID MILLER

I am [David Miller](#)<sup>3</sup>, Professor of Political Sociology at the University of Bristol. I have long had an interest in propaganda in relation to conflict, starting with the coverage of Northern Ireland in the 1980s on which I wrote my PhD. After that I wrote about the conflict in Afghanistan and then the attack on Iraq in 2003. This is not the first time I have met a member of Special Forces, but it is,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.couragefound.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.couragefound.org/2019/10/analytical-points-opcw-panel/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/people/david-miller/index.html>

I am pretty sure, the first time that I have sat on a platform with someone from Special Forces of the British military [John Holmes]. I think that this captures something of irony of the situation in which we find ourselves.

I want to look at the timing of events of the alleged attack in Douma. There is evidence of fraud here that my colleagues will talk about in more detail.

The alleged attack happened on 7 April 2018 and was widely reported as a sarin, or sarin and chlorine, attack.

On 14 April 2018 an OPCW fact finding mission (FFM) was deployed to Damascus.

On 6 July 2018 an [OPCW Interim Report](#)<sup>4</sup> was published confirming that no nerve agent had been found.

On 1 March 2019 the [Final Report of the OPCW](#)<sup>5</sup> was published and stated there were 'reasonable grounds' to believe a chemical weapon attack had occurred and clearly implying that this involved chlorine gas cylinders having been dropped from Syrian government helicopters.

In May 2019 the [suppressed Engineers' Report](#)<sup>6</sup> was leaked to the Working Group on Syria.

We [the Working Group on Syria, Propaganda and Media (WGSPM)] received the documents, in one of those classic moments when an unassuming white envelope arrives in the post at work, and on opening, it is very much more significant than one might have anticipated. We then checked the documents out, and published them online.

The envelope included the following message from the former senior official at the OPCW:

**'We live in a dangerous world, that's why we must be very cautious when talking about matters related to the OPCW... The years I served [redacted] were the most stressful and unpleasant ones of my professional life... I feel ashamed for the Organisation and I am glad I left it. I fear those behind the crimes that have been perpetrated in the name of 'humanity and democracy'; they will not hesitate to do harm to me and my family.**

**'My ethical behaviour... turned me into someone not useful for the group. As a result, [redacted] sidelined me on all matters related to FFMs and, to some extent, to all strategic matters related to Syria... I was not the only one facing**

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/S\\_series/2018/en/s-1645-2018\\_e\\_.pdf](https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/S_series/2018/en/s-1645-2018_e_.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019/03/s-1731-2019%28e%29.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://syriapropagandamedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Engineering-assessment-of-two-cylinders-observed-at-the-Douma-incident-27-February-2019-1.pdf>

**such treatment, for sure, but my case in particular should never have happened.**

**'How can one justify the fact that [redacted] is excluded from the decision-making process and management of the most critical operations carried out... ODG [Office of the Director-General] was in charge of the FFMs from the moment this instrument was created, they were the ones with full control over each and every important decision made... I admire your work and your courage to go after the truth but to me the consequences of what I say may be dire... I don't want to expose myself and my family to their violence and revenge.'**

In October 2019 a Courage Foundation Panel met in Brussels with one of the whistleblowers (not the whistleblower who wrote the Engineering Report [Ian Henderson], and produced a statement that Jonathan [Steele] will talk about. The statement can be found [here](#)<sup>7</sup> and detailed analytical points emerging from the Courage Foundation panel can be found [here](#)<sup>8</sup>.

Between December 2019 and the present, Wikileaks has been publishing [multiple documents](#)<sup>9</sup> leaked from the FFM investigation. These included the original interim report agreed by the Douma FFM team but which was subsequently redacted and edited and published as the official interim report on 6 July 2018.

These have also been published through social media, and in [The Mail on Sunday](#)<sup>10</sup> by Peter Hitchens.

I recommend that you watch the [YouTube clip of Ian Henderson](#)<sup>11</sup>, who wrote the Engineering Report, addressing the UN Security Council on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2020.

He says in it why he feels able to speak publicly at the UN Security Council at the invitation of the members of the council.

Finally, we have identified evidence of fraud in the following areas:

1. Redaction of the original Interim Report to remove its concerns over ballistics and toxicology.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://couragefound.org/2019/10/opcw-panel-statement/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://couragefound.org/2019/10/analytical-points-opcw-panel/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://wikileaks.org/opcw-douma/#OPCW-DOUMA%20-%20Release%20Part%204>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7793253/PETER-HITCHENS-reveals-evidence-watchdog-suppressed-report-casting-doubt-Assad-gas-attack.html>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZknLgDXuaBg>

2. Allowing the US delegation to brief the Douma team prior to the publication of the Interim Report, thus illegally putting pressure on OPCW FFM team.
3. Exclusion of the Douma FFM team (bar one paramedic) from the proceedings from July 2018 onwards.
4. Suppression of the Engineering Report, leak of which we [WGSPM] received and published last year
5. Refusal to allow the Douma FFM team to either see the Final Report or to brief OPCW delegates
6. Evidence of intimidation within the OPCW of members of staff, not just from the FFM

## PIERS ROBINSON

I am a co-director of the [Organisation for Propaganda Studies](https://propagandastudies.ac.uk/)<sup>12</sup> and the Convenor of the [Working Group on Syria, Propaganda and Media](https://syriapropagandamedia.org/).<sup>13</sup>

My academic background is in political communication and international politics. I previously focused on the use of intelligence in the run up to the Iraq War and its manipulation in that case. I have expertise in the examination of documents and manipulation of evidence. I am not a ballistics or toxicology expert. Rather, my role is to relay the concerns that have been raised by OPWC scientists, first in leaked documents and also in person.

By flagging their major points, you should get an idea of how badly wrong the investigation has gone, and why there are reasonable grounds for doubting that the Douma chemical weapons attack took place.

Two major issues concern ballistics and toxicology.

### **Ballistics**

The Syrian army allegedly dropped two chlorine canisters from a helicopter, one of which fell onto a balcony, and one of which landed in a bedroom. Concerning this there are major differences between the original Interim Report [the report being referred to here is the leaked original interim report agreed by the Douma FFM team but which was subsequently redacted and edited], the suppressed Engineering Report – and the Final Report (March 2019) which was

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<sup>12</sup> <https://propagandastudies.ac.uk/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://syriapropagandamedia.org/>

largely produced by people who never went to Douma. Suppressed evidence indicates that the cylinders were more likely placed by hand than dropped from a helicopter.

## **Toxicology**

It is disputed how those alleged to have died in a chlorine attack on Douma did in fact die. There was much obfuscation in the Final Report regarding how the victims were killed and inconsistencies regarding chlorine being the cause. From my discussion of this you will get an idea of why the OPCW scientists have been concerned, and why they have started to talk to people outside the organisation.

Two further issues were raised at the Courage Foundation panel:

### **Reporting of the chemistry results regarding indications of chlorine**

Arguments have been made that not all the correct data, including levels of traces found, were presented in the Final Report. The Final Report therefore lacks the science and data to back up what the OPCW is claiming.

### **Witness statements**

The original team made a clear distinction between the data they gathered from witnesses interviewed in Douma, and witnesses interviewed in Turkey. The sharp inconsistencies between the accounts of these two batches of witnesses were made clear in the original Interim Report. In the Final Report these accounts were merged, so there was no clear presentation of these discrepancies.

Fuller details can be found in the Analytical Points from the [Courage Foundation Panel](https://couragefound.org/2019/10/analytical-points-opcw-panel/).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> <https://couragefound.org/2019/10/analytical-points-opcw-panel/>

**To enlarge:  
Ballistics**

Location 2

The alleged chlorine gas munition at Location 2 landed on a balcony and is alleged to have discharged its contents; this chlorine moved down through the building and killed several dozen people in the staircases. The top-left image [below] was the one first published by [Bellingcat](https://www.bellingcat.com/).<sup>15</sup> There is a man standing behind the munition, which has a dent on the top. That image was subsequently deleted by Eliot Higgins of Bellingcat.



In the replacement image on the right [below] the munition has been rotated, the dent has been aligned with the metal bar on the concrete (which has been tilted), and there is no man. This clearly indicates manipulation of the cylinder.



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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.bellingcat.com/>



The main concern of the suppressed Engineering Report (which was leaked) was that the damage done to the cylinder could not be reconciled with the damage to the roof and metal bars.



The original Interim Report states that:

**‘The FFM team is unable to provide satisfactory explanations for the relatively moderate damage to the cylinders allegedly dropped from an unknown height, compared to the destruction caused to the rebar-reinforced concrete roofs.’**

The suppressed Engineering Report confirmed the doubts raised in the original Interim Report stating:

**‘All the elements listed above point to the conclusion that the alleged impact event (or events) leading to observed vessel deformation and concrete damage were not compatible.’**

Obviously this evidence suggests that the cylinders were hand-placed, not dropped from a helicopter. The Final Report had apparently solved the problem and stated the opposite – that the damage was all consistent:

**‘The analyses indicate that the damage observed on the cylinder found on the roof terrace, the aperture, the balcony, the surrounding rooms, and the rooms**

**underneath and the structure above, is consistent with the creation of the aperture observed in the terrace by the cylinder found at that location.'**

That is, it found that the hole in the building was compatible with the minimal damage that one can see on the cylinder. This discrepancy was one of the things that drove one of the people inside the OPCW to release the original Engineering Report by Ian Henderson; science indicates that the hole and the lack of damage to the cylinder are incompatible.



#### Location 4

The other alleged chlorine gas munition was found at Location 4 on a bed. This photo was provided by one of the opposition groups in Douma.



One issue here is the cylinder's trajectory. It allegedly fell horizontally, smashed through the ceiling, impacted on the floor, and changed direction to end up on the bed. The Douma FFM team were clear in their original Interim Report that:

**'It is not clear what would have caused the cylinder to change directory towards the bed, since there are no indications that it made contact with any of the walls or window underneath. It is unclear also how the cylinder would have sufficient kinetic energy to travel the more than 3 meters towards the bed and land atop without causing significant damage to the bed.'**

The Final Report allegedly solves this riddle by simply avoiding giving details:

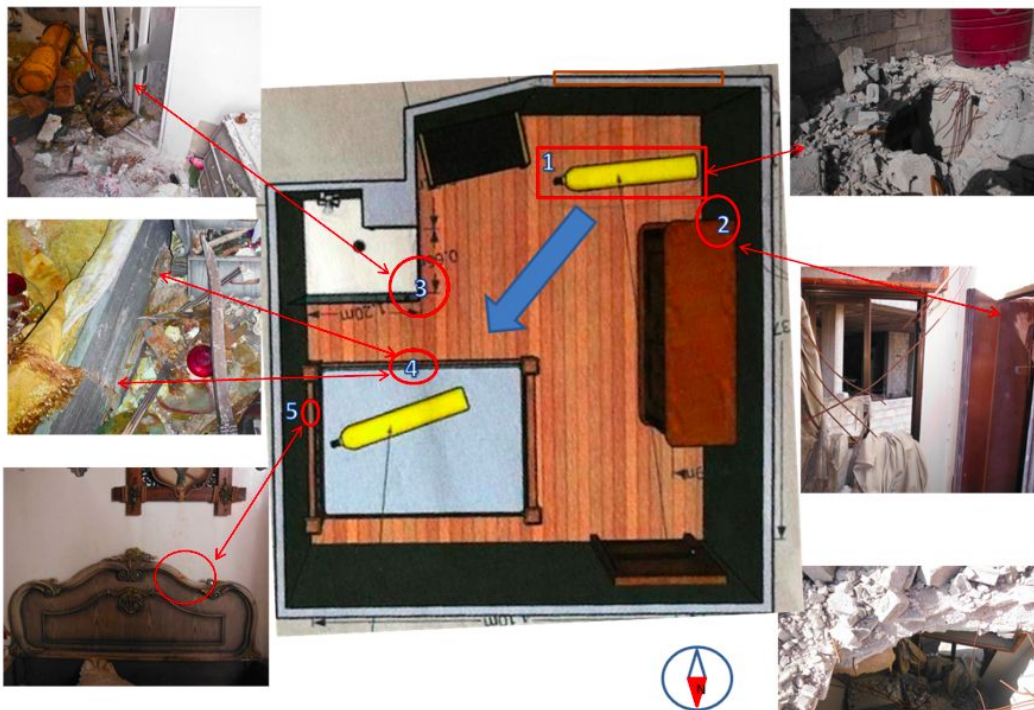
**'The assessments further indicated that, after passing through the ceiling and impacting the floor at lower speed, the cylinder continued altered trajectory, until reaching the position in which it was found.'**

[continues next page]

However, the suppressed Engineering Report was very clear:

**‘Examination of walls in the bedroom did not indicate marks that would indicate the equal and opposite forces required to deflect the cylinder in a horizontal direction ... it was not possible to establish a set of circumstances that were consistent with observations, which could have resulted in that movement.’**

**FIGURE 15: TRAJECTORY OF THE CYLINDER INSIDE THE ROOM**



As with the cylinder at Location 2, this evidence indicates that the cylinders were manipulated by hand rather than having been dropped from a helicopter.

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[WARNING: graphic images]

## Toxicology: The Douma deceased



Dead people, including women and children, were photographed in the staircases at Location 2 by groups on the ground, and were put up on the internet very quickly.

The Final Report stated that the deaths were alleged to have been caused by chlorine gas leaking through the hole caused by the impact of the gas canister, which then built up inside the building.

However, the original Interim Report was clear that the symptoms reported were not consistent with chlorine poisoning:

**'Some of the signs and symptoms described by witnesses and noted in photos and video recordings taken by witnesses of the alleged victims are not consistent with exposure to chlorine-containing choking or blood agents such as chlorine gas, phosgene or cyanogen chloride. Specifically, rapid onset of heavy buccal and nasal frothing in many victims, as well as the colour of the secretions, is not indicative of intoxication from such chemicals.'**

That is, chlorine would not cause large numbers of people to drop dead whilst foaming at the mouth. That might be the result of a sarin attack, but no traces of that were found and that was

not what was alleged. The original report was clear that the people did not die because of chlorine. Paul [McKeigue] will say more later about how these people may have come to die.

The collection of bodies in the stairwell didn't make sense, since those subjected to chlorine will try to escape. The original Interim Report was clear about this too:

**'The large number of decedents in the one location (allegedly 40-45), most of whom were seen in videos and photos strewn on the floor of the apartments away from open windows, and within a few meters of an escape to un-poisoned or less-toxic air, is at odds with intoxication by chlorine-based choking or blood agents, even at high concentrations.'**

At the meeting of the toxicologists, their advice was that the people had not been killed by chlorine poisoning.

The Final Report executes a U-turn on that original finding but without providing any clear explanation of why nor any new toxicology advice that might support the changes (see the Courage Foundation Analytical Points for more details). It still acknowledges that the alleged events indicate an agent capable of killing quickly (i.e. a nerve agent like Sarin), but it obfuscates the clear advice given by toxicologists, stating instead that the symptoms cannot be linked with any particular chemical:

**'The location, positions and lack of visible trauma on the victims in the videos taken inside the building indicate exposure to a rapidly incapacitating or a highly toxic substance. The victims do not appear to have been in the midst of attempting self-extrication or respiratory protection when they collapsed, indicating a very rapid or instant onset. This type of collapse is indicative of an agent capable of quickly killing or immobilising.'**

**'Many of the signs and symptoms reported by the medical personnel, witnesses and casualties (as well as those seen in multiple videos provided by witnesses), their rapid onset, and the large number of those reportedly affected, indicate exposure to an inhalational irritant or toxic substance. However, based on the information reviewed and with the absence of biomedical samples from the dead bodies or any autopsy records, it is not currently possible to precisely link the cause of the signs and symptoms to a specific chemical.'**

## **Summary**

So, whilst the Final Report concludes that there were 'reasonable grounds' to believe that there had indeed been a chemical weapon attack, the actual suppressed evidence regarding ballistics

and toxicology suggests that the alleged attack looks much more likely to have been the result of staging than the result of a helicopter dropping chlorine cylinders. Overall, it is the inconsistencies between the various reports and the suppression of evidence that are at the root of why concerns are being raised by OPCW persons.

## JONATHAN STEELE

I used to work at The Guardian, but now I am freelance. I attended the Courage Foundation panel in Brussels in October 2019 by invitation as an independent reporter. I first heard about the OPCW whistleblower from Peter Ford, former UK ambassador to Syria. He told me about an event at Brussels where this whistleblower would give evidence.

I was interested because I already knew that there had been suppression of the Ian Henderson [Engineers'] Report. When I heard that there was a second whistleblower from this small team that had been in Douma, I knew that this meant something. Normally whistleblowers are lone wolves, often alienated from their colleagues. If two turn up, this is impressive.

This is not just a story of scientific evidence being suppressed, but about media timidity at best, and irresponsible bias and even censorship at worst.

I was also interested by the fact that it was the Courage Foundation that was organising this Panel.

The Courage Foundation, which was founded in 2013, has defended distinguished whistleblowers including Snowden, Manning, and Assange. There were five on the panel. One was our distinguished chair Major General John Holmes. One was the Wikileaks Editor-in-Chief Kristinn Hrafnsson. One was Richard Falk, a former UN special rapporteur on Palestine. Karin Leukefeld is a German journalist who was there independently.

When we heard the whistleblower, he was extremely impressive. He gave a PowerPoint presentation which lasted for several hours. It was clear that he did not have an axe to grind. If he were someone with a political axe to grind, he would not have been sent on a fact-finding mission to Douma. When he spoke it was clear that he was a scientist who knew his subject. He made it clear that he was not against the OPCW. He said that he respected the organisation, but that he wanted it to live up to its own standards of accountability and impartiality.

He said that the dissident scientists within the OPCW should be allowed to address the 193 members [of the OPCW] at its annual meeting.

Subsequently a [Statement](#)<sup>16</sup> [based on his evidence] was endorsed by the first Director-General of the OPCW José Bustani, now a Brazilian diplomat, who said that it fitted with his understanding. Others, including Noam Chomsky, also endorsed the Statement (a full list is [here](#)).<sup>17</sup>

I knew that this would be difficult to get into the media because there is phenomenal bias in UK and US media on Syria, and very few journalists have come along with independent evidence which they have been able to get published. There are a few exceptions: Peter Hitchens of The Mail on Sunday, and [Robert Fisk](#)<sup>18</sup> of The Independent. There are a few in the US.

I was lucky because three days after the Brussels panel I appeared on the BBC World Service programme '[Weekend](#).'<sup>19</sup> You chat, you can say what you like, you talk about what interesting stories have you been covering – this is a personal type of magazine programme. I was lucky to be on it at that time. I spoke about the impressive whistleblower I had listened to. So I did get something onto the BBC.

But when I tried The Guardian, I thought that there would be no point in trying with a news story. I thought that an opinion piece would stand a better chance, because The Guardian wouldn't have to stand behind it.

My article pointed out that when I contacted the OPCW they refused to reply. I sent them a second email reminding them I was about to publish. Again there was silence, which I think is evidence of an interesting management culture. You just don't not-reply to journalists if you have evidence that rebuts their accusations. This suggests fear or arrogance or both. I put all of that in the Guardian article. But it was rejected.

I then applied to various websites and got rejections. Some asked me for documentation which would back up the whistleblower's allegations.

I said that I had seen emails on screen [internal OPCW emails shown by the whistleblower during his presentation], and heard convincing oral testimony.

It is not up to a journalist to decide what it is the truth. If you put credible-sounding allegations from an authoritative source to an organisation and ask for a response, that is what journalists do; if they don't reply, you then have to report that. You can't do a full investigation. You would have to be a scientist to do that.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://couragefound.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Letter-to-Permanent-Representatives.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.globalresearch.ca/opcw-must-come-clean-grave-flaws-in-syria-report-open-letter-to-states-representatives/5695506>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/author/robert-fisk>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00wf2qw>



The other reason for rejecting my article was political. One of the websites said that my article promoted the views of the Russian and Syrian governments. What did that have to do with it? It seemed to be a question of guilt by association. Another website said that they had lots of people in the Middle East who didn't take this view, and that they would get a huge backlash if they printed these allegations.

Eventually I did publish in [Counterpunch](#)<sup>20</sup> on 15 November 2019. This carried quite a lot of weight, because it was followed up by other sources.

## PAUL McKEIGUE

I'll start by introducing myself. I trained as a doctor, and then as an epidemiologist and public health specialist. My expertise includes the investigation of scientific fraud, and the investigation of mass casualty incidents. I first started studying the alleged chemical attacks in Syria around 2015. That led to me discovering colleagues like Professor Tim Hayward at my own university, who shared my interest in investigating the stories that we were hearing from Syria.

People sometimes ask me why I am doing this, in the face of flak directed at us. One reason is that I was brought up to believe in parliamentary government. As children, each of us, at the age of eleven or twelve, was taken to a debate at the House of Commons. We were told that this was something special about our system of government. One of my concerns in relation to the alleged chemical attacks in Syria has been that Parliament has been misled.

On 14 April 2018, the UK had joined the US and France in a missile attack on Syria, without recalling Parliament for a vote. Two days later, Theresa May in the House of Commons responded to Sir Edward Leigh MP, who had apparently expressed doubts.

Theresa May's statement to the House of Commons on 16 April 2018:

**'I can give [Sir Edward Leigh MP] the absolute assurance that, from the intelligence that I have seen, from the analysis that I have seen and from the assessments that I have heard, I am in absolutely no doubt that the Syrian regime was responsible for this attack in Douma.**

**'The first [target] was the Barzeh branch of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre in northern Damascus. This was a centre for the research and development of Syria's chemical and biological programme.'**

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<https://www.counterpunch.org/2019/11/15/the-opcw-and-douma-chemical-weapons-watchdog-accused-of-evidence-tampering-by-its-own-inspectors/>

Corbyn's reply expressed doubts about her reliance on 'intelligence':

'The Prime Minister will be aware that the OPCW carried out inspections on [Barzeh] in 2017 and concluded that "the inspection team did not observe any activities inconsistent with obligations" under the chemical weapons convention. Can the Prime Minister advise the House whether she believes that the OPCW was wrong in that assessment, or does she have separate intelligence that the nature of those activities has changed within the last five months?

'In the light of the Chilcot inquiry, does she agree with a key recommendation about the importance of strengthening the checks and assessments on intelligence information when it is used to make the case for Government policies?'

We now know that the OPCW inspectors who deployed to Douma had, in the words of Ian Henderson, "serious misgivings that a chemical attack had occurred".

One of them has told us that it took him only an hour on site to see that the scene had been staged, and crudely staged at that. So how were the intelligence officials able to give the Prime Minister such unequivocal advice? To examine this we shall look at the information that was available during the first week after the incident, before the OPCW inspectors had deployed to Damascus.

The time of the alleged chemical attack was reported by the White Helmets' Twitter account as 8.22 pm local time. The first images recorded by opposition cameramen of around 35 dead bodies were timed to about 10 pm. These showed the bodies of mostly women and children in a ground floor and first floor apartment in a four-storey building, 'Location 2'. From examining the post-mortem changes seen in the images of victims – eye changes, lividity, rigor mortis – we estimate that the time of death could have been no earlier than 3 hours before the first images appeared at 10 pm. Thus the time of death could not have been no earlier than the hospital dousing scene that was recorded at about 7 pm.

[continues next page]

[WARNING: graphic images]

### Timeline of the incident on Saturday 7 April (local time)

- 7 pm: hospital dousing scene recorded by opposition cameramen, videos uploaded at 12 pm
- 8.22 pm: time of alleged chemical attack reported by [White Helmets Twitter account](#).<sup>21</sup>
- 10 pm onwards: first images recorded by opposition cameramen showed roughly 35 dead bodies, mostly women and children, in a ground-floor apartment and first floor apartment in a four-storey building (“Location 2”).

Timing of post-mortem changes (corneal clouding, lividity, rigor mortis) in images indicates death no more than 2-3 hours before the first images recorded at 10 pm.

### Pile of bodies in the ground floor apartment at Location 2:



Analysis of the videos and still images uploaded by opposition cameramen has shown obvious evidence of staging. We can see that bodies were rearranged between photo sessions; children originally separated from adults were placed with women. From a careful study of these images, intelligence agencies should have been able to detect enough of staging in the first few days after the incident to make them skeptical of the opposition’s story.

<sup>21</sup> <https://twitter.com/SyriaCivilDef/status/982735364518567937>

## Why intelligence officials should have been skeptical during the first week after the Douma incident

Obvious staging in the images uploaded by opposition-linked media outlets

- Bodies rearranged between photo sessions, chlorine cylinder on bed at Location 4 misrepresented as cause of deaths at Location 2.
- Alleged attack is not consistent with epidemiological experience of chlorine incidents.
- A 44-litre chlorine cylinder dropped from the air would not be lethal unless victims were trapped in a confined space.
- Victims' bodies were gathered in piles, a few steps from the street.
- Case fatality rate of 100%, no non-fatal cases requiring prolonged hospital treatment.
- Post-mortem signs seen in images of victims are not consistent with sudden death from chlorine as alleged.

For the first two days after the incident, opposition cameramen misrepresented the cylinder on a bed at Location 4 as the cause of the deaths of the victims seen in images recorded at Location 2, about 800 metres away. When Russian military inspectors were allowed into Douma this misrepresentation could no longer be maintained.

### Misattribution of the cylinder at Location 4 to Location 2

Sunday 8 April: videos showing a chlorine cylinder on a bed in another building ('Location 4') were misrepresented as the munition at the site where the victims had been.



Valve still intact, cylinder partly full.

Only on 10th April did the cameramen upload images that correctly identified the cylinder on the balcony at Location 2 as being at the 'same location as videos of casualties'. An image uploaded by Bellingcat on 9 April, later deleted, had shown this cylinder in a different position.



10 April: video of cylinder on balcony at Location 2, now correctly identified as 'same location as videos of casualties'.

Image uploaded by Bellingcat on 9 April (subsequently deleted) had shown the cylinder in a different position.

Anyone familiar with the epidemiology of accidents in the chemical industry would have been able to advise the intelligence agencies that it was highly unlikely that this incident could have been a chemical attack with chlorine as alleged. There have been many industrial accidents with chlorine over the past century, so there is ample experience on which to draw. The largest recent industrial accident was at Graniteville, South Carolina, in 2005. 55 tons of liquid chlorine were released in a rail crash in the middle of a town. There were nine fatalities, 554 non-fatal cases who sought hospital treatment, and all residents but one were safely evacuated. Typically, in chlorine accidents, most of those exposed manage to get away even if they later need hospital treatment.

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## Epidemiology of industrial accidents with chlorine

- Case fatality rate in chlorine incidents is typically less than 1:10, and most victims manage to escape.
- Largest industrial accident was Graniteville, S Carolina (2005) where 55 tons of liquid chlorine was released in a rail crash in the middle of the town.
- 554 non-fatal casualties sought hospital treatment, 9 fatalities, all residents but one safely evacuated.
- To be effective as a weapon, chlorine has to be released on an industrial scale as at Ypres in April 1915 (168 tons)
- Low toxicity and requirement for containment in a high-pressure cylinder makes it unlikely that chlorine would be used as a weapon delivered from the air.
- Discharge of chlorine from cylinder on balcony would not have been enough to kill victims on the spot in an apartment three floors below.

What epidemiologists call the case fatality rate – the ratio of fatal cases to total diagnosed cases – is typically less than 5 percent in chlorine incidents. We would expect to see at least 10 non-fatal cases requiring hospital treatment for every fatal case. The Douma incident, with at least 34 fatalities allegedly on the spot but no cases admitted to hospital, is unlike any recorded chlorine incident.

To be effective as a weapon, chlorine has to be released on an industrial scale, as at Ypres in April 1915, when more than 150 tonnes were released creating a cloud too big to run out of. Discharge of chlorine from a 44-litre cylinder on a balcony would not have been enough to kill victims in an apartment three floors below.

## What Happened to the Bodies?

Sunday 8 April, 10 am onwards, images showed White Helmets removing bodies from Location 2, laying them out in the street, and transferring them to a collection point.

Josie Ensor ([Telegraph, 21 April](#)<sup>22</sup>) reported that Jaish al-Islam had buried the bodies in an unmarked mass grave. [Reuters](#)<sup>23</sup> (18 April) reported that Raed Saleh, leader of the White Helmets had given the coordinates of the graves to the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission sub-team in Turkey.

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<sup>22</sup><https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/04/21/bodies-douma-gas-victims-secretly-buried-desperate-bid-preserve/>

<sup>23</sup>

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/mideast-crisis-syria-bodies/syrian-rescuers-give-opcw-team-locations-of-suspected-attack-graves-idUKL8N1RV2BP>

OPCW Technical Secretariat has declined to confirm whether they were given the locations of the graves.

With no autopsies, the only information we have about how the victims died is from the images of the victims. Most victims have foam in their airways. This happens when the lungs fill with protein-rich fluid (pulmonary edema) and this fluid becomes foamy (like egg white) as air is bubbled through it by efforts to breathe. So for foam to appear, there has to be time for pulmonary edema to develop and the victim must be still breathing while this happens.

### **Images of victims – consultation with NATO medical experts on chemical defence, 6 June 2018**

Exposure to very high levels of chlorine can cause immediate respiratory arrest (laryngeal spasm), but in this situation there would be no time for pulmonary edema to develop and for the edema fluid to become foamy.

For chlorine to have caused foamy edema fluid, victims would have had to continue breathing for at least 30 minutes: they would have been able to escape, and would not have 'gathered in piles'.

Nerve agents and opiates can cause collapse on the spot and also pulmonary edema, but no such agents were detected, and delivering them would not need a high-pressure chlorine cylinder.

Conclusion of the 'chief expert': whatever killed the victims, it was not chlorine.

We know from the leaked documents that the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission consulted a NATO panel of medical experts in toxicology in June 2018. The chief expert, having examined the images of the victims, concluded that whatever had killed them, it could not have been chlorine. While chlorine can cause pulmonary edema, this is a delayed effect and the victims would have had time to escape, rather than collapsing in piles only a few steps from the street. Massive exposure to chlorine can cause immediate respiratory arrest by blocking the larynx (laryngeal spasm), but in this situation there would be no pulmonary edema and no foam. Nerve agents and opiates can cause immediate collapse and rapid onset of pulmonary edema, but no such agents had been detected in the environmental samples taken from Location 2 or in the blood samples taken from purported eyewitnesses.

[continues next page]

## How did the victims die?

Hypothesis 1. Victims were killed by a chlorine cylinder dropped from the air.

Hypothesis 2. Bodies of victims asphyxiated while sheltering from bombardment were repurposed to stage a chemical attack.

Hypothesis 3. Victims were captives killed in a gas chamber, whose bodies were brought to Location 2 [*\* Note: the original slide had a typographical error saying Location 4 instead of Location 2*]

## Evidence favouring H3 over H2

- Victims died about the same time with similar signs: foam in airway, yellow-brown skin discoloration.
- Hospital dousing scene was staged at about the same time that the victims died.
- No signs of smoke inhalation or exposure to bombardment.
- Grimy hands and clothes.

I'll now examine what we can conclude about how the victims died. To evaluate evidence, you have to compare how competing hypotheses would have predicted the observations. For the Douma incident, we can formulate three competing hypotheses as shown in this slide:

H1 is ruled out by the incompatibility with the epidemiological features of chlorine incidents, the toxicology assessment of how the victims died, and by Ian Henderson's engineering study of the cylinders and the craters. So this leaves us to compare H2, and H3. H2 was suggested to us by a BBC producer who has worked closely with the White Helmets.

[continues next page]

[WARNING: graphic images]



Foam in airway, lateral and periorbital skin discoloration.



Several lines of evidence favour H3 over H2:

Most of the victims appear to have died at about the same time from the same cause. It would be an improbable coincidence that the bodies happened to be available just at the time they were needed to stage a chemical incident.

The hospital dousing scene was recorded at about 7 pm, no later than the earliest estimate of the time of death of the victims. Those who recorded the hospital scene had to know in advance that bodies of victims would be available.

Victims showed no signs of smoke inhalation or of exposure to bombardment, with the exception of one victim who was covered in grey dust and had an airway in place.

Grimy hands and clothes suggest that the victims were held without access to washing facilities.

[continues next page]

[WARNING: graphic images]

Progression of yellow-brown skin discoloration.



These slides don't project properly, and perhaps that's just as well as they are harrowing. They show foam in the airways and an unusual yellow-brown skin discoloration where fluid from the airways has flowed over the face. This may be an important clue to how the victims died.

We can see in some victims that this yellow-brown discoloration appears to progress after death, and that in many victims it affects the upper part of the face, implying that fluid has flowed upwards over the face and thus that the victims were in a head-down position: perhaps restrained or suspended.

### **If the Douma incident was staged what does this imply?**

- The Prime Minister was misled by her intelligence advisers (led by Sir Mark Sedwill) into attacking another country on a pretext, without a vote in Parliament.
- The next war could be initiated by a staged incident.
- A staged operation would have entailed the murder of at least 30 civilian captives, mostly women and children.
- Staging would have required the active participation of the White Helmets, set up by the late James Le Mesurier (a former military intelligence officer) with funding from the UK and other governments.
- We have learned that from 2015 onwards Le Mesurier worked closely in Turkey with Team Alpha of the Fact-Finding Mission to select White Helmets as "witnesses" to be interviewed by the FFM. With such a well-placed source, it is all the more inexcusable that UK intelligence agencies got it wrong.

### **The UK government reiterates that it can take military action without a Parliamentary vote**

Emily Thornberry MP, 10 September 2018 [asked](#)<sup>24</sup>:

**'If the Government intends to take [military action in response to reports of chemical attacks] ... will the Minister of State guarantee the House that we will be given a vote to approve such action before it takes place, even if that means recalling Parliament?'**

Alistair Burt, Minister for the Middle East, answered:

**'As we have demonstrated, we will respond appropriately to any further use by the Syrian regime of chemical weapons ... There are circumstances, depending on the nature of any attack, in which the United Kingdom Government needs to move swiftly ... I am not prepared**

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<sup>24</sup><https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2018-09-10/debates/CF970CA2-402E-4CAC-96B4-F480CC33FC7B/ldlib?highlight=syria#contribution-6132343E-DA3E-4D75-A8E2-0AF58B5AB93D>

**to say at this stage what the United Kingdom's detailed reaction might be or to give any timescale.'**

A few months after the incident, the Government reiterated that it had the power to take military action in response to an alleged chemical attack without a Parliamentary vote.

### **An MP's response to the Working Group's investigations of the Douma incident**

November 2019: Richard Benyon MP (member of Intelligence and Security Committee till dissolution) briefed [PBS News Hour](#)<sup>25</sup>:

**'There's a much more sinister element, which is very often people from within top academic institutions, universities in the United Kingdom ... The universities employing who are extremely suspect individuals with disgusting views, where they are prepared to be the apologists for the kind of brutality that we are seeing in Syria, universities themselves have got to take responsibility for this.'**

The University of Edinburgh has always defended academic freedom in the face of attacks on Tim Hayward and me. It saddens me that we have now reached a point where MPs and journalists no longer see it as their job to [hold](#) government to account, but rather to smear and intimidate those who try to do so.

### **What can MPs do to hold the government and intelligence services to account?**

Written questions to Ministers were brushed off:

Asked by Chris Williamson, 3 June 2019:

**'To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs ... with reference to reports that OPCW expert advice was redacted from its final report, whether he has made a reassessment of the decision to bomb targets in Syria in 2018.'**

Answered by Sir Alan Duncan:

**'The UK has full confidence in the expertise and methodologies of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact Finding Mission (FFM) ... The OPCW Technical Secretariat has confirmed**

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<sup>25</sup><https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/mysterious-death-of-white-helmets-co-founder-spotlights-toxic-prop-aganda>

**that all evidence and views were considered in preparing the FFM report.'**

I will close with some suggestions for what MPs might do to investigate this. Written parliamentary questions to Ministers have been brushed off. For instance, in June 2019 Chris Williamson MP asked the Foreign Secretary whether, in the light of reports that expert advice had been suppressed in preparing the Final Report of the Fact-Finding Mission, he had 'made a reassessment of the decision to bomb targets in Syria in 2018.'

### **What can Parliamentary Committees do?**

Foreign Affairs Select Committee could investigate the role of the UK in preventing OPCW inspectors from being allowed to give an official briefing.

Intelligence and Security Committee could investigate the role of "intelligence officials" in misleading the Prime Minister.

Investigations by Parliamentary Committees might be more effective.

### JOHN HOLMES

I would observe that civil wars are the most violent of conflicts. Ones that go on for a long time like the one in Syria are doubly violent. The thought of an organisation identifying and perhaps murdering 30 people to put them into a scenario is entirely possible. That's the kind of thing that happens in a civil war. I hope we have laid some concerns in your mind that the Final Report was not the final report.

### **QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION (selective transcript)**

ALEXANDER MERCOURIS (Editor-in-chief, [The Duran](https://www.theduranc.com/)<sup>26</sup>)

What are the panel's views on the practical importance of the [Chemical Weapons Convention](https://www.opcw.org/chemical-weapons-convention)<sup>27</sup>, and the need for a trustworthy OPCW to enforce it?

PAUL McKEIGUE

The Chemical Weapons Convention took ten years to negotiate, beginning in the late 1980s. The Convention lays down strict criteria for the independence of the OPCW's inspectors from all

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.theduranc.com/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.opcw.org/chemical-weapons-convention>

State Parties and from management. The procedure for investigation of alleged use of chemical weapons specifies that the role of the Director-General is limited to selecting and dispatching the inspectors, then receiving their report and transmitting it to the UN Secretary-General.

In 2014 the OPCW created a new instrument called the Fact-Finding Mechanism. This allowed OPCW management to make up their own rules and thus to interfere with the inspectors' reports. There is however one paragraph in the Convention that can be read as granting inspectors the right to attach "differing observations" to reports, and this paragraph is part of a section that applies to "all inspections conducted pursuant to this Convention".

### JOHN HOLMES

Multinational organisations are by definition political. I worked for three years in the headquarters of NATO. Because member nations contribute to the budget to varying degrees, they want corresponding influence. You will find that the staffing levels are enormous in order to compensate contributory countries with posts in the organisation. One of the major challenges facing the OPCW is to be apolitical.

### RAYMOND ASQUITH (The Earl of Oxford OBE)

The questions you have raised about the medical report [Toxicology Report] lead to an explosive hypothesis. Those details and the analysis that you presented today, were they also contained in the Interim or Final OPCW Report? I don't dispute the likelihood of the suggested hypotheses; and I recognise that the conclusion that you have postulated is a perfectly possible one. But for the British media and the public it is a remarkable conclusion to come to.

### PAUL McKEIGUE

The remit of the OPCW investigation was limited to determining whether a toxic chemical had been used as a weapon. The inspectors did not explore alternative hypotheses. I think this is a methodological error. You cannot evaluate evidence without considering competing hypotheses. This can be proved from simple rules of logical consistency. Exhumation of the victims, even several months later would have been relevant to a murder investigation, even if it was less relevant to deciding whether a chemical attack was the cause. Now that the summary of the toxicology consultation has been published, I plan to convene a panel of experts, including forensic pathologists, to review the findings and to report on what the images tell us about the cause of death.

MIKE KING (Independent scholar)

I have written a [book](#)<sup>28</sup> on Syria with a forward by Peter Ford. I wonder whether there are parallels between the Douma situation and what happened at Khan Shaykhun?

[The OPCW report on the Khan Shaykhun incident is [here](#)<sup>29</sup>]

I investigated that and was forced to come up with the alternative hypothesis that it was staged. Again, the White Helmets were involved.

You [John Holmes] say that in war these things happen. I agree that the opposition forces were quite capable of doing something like this [murdering people in order to fake a chemical weapons attack]. But one of the White Helmets missions is mortuary services, so they always have bodies to hand.

I would like the Select Committee Enquiry to extend to the White Helmets, the UOSSM [[Union of Medical Care and Relief Organisations](#)]<sup>30</sup> (based in France) and three or four other organisations, none of which have any international observers on the ground.

What chances are there of the Foreign Affairs select committee doing this? [Vanessa Beeley](#)<sup>31</sup> has been gathering evidence.

I suspect that this government will not be interested in looking at it, but is it possible that parliament might want to do this.

SAMI RAMADANI (Academic and Journalist)

It is vitally important to investigate the Douma incident regarding a) possible murder, b) the launching war on false premises.

It has become almost customary now to invent or stage incidents to instigate war, for example in Iraq where I was born. The 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq were also based on a lie. The Vietnam War was initially based on a lie.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.stochasticpress.com/>

<sup>29</sup> [https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/Fact\\_Finding\\_Mission/s-1510-2017\\_e\\_.pdf](https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/Fact_Finding_Mission/s-1510-2017_e_.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.uossm.org>

<sup>31</sup> <https://renegadeinc.com/tag/vanessa-beeley/>

PATRICK HENNINGSEN (Editor of [21<sup>st</sup> Century Wire](https://www.21stcenturywire.com/)<sup>32</sup>)

Did the OPCW really go about their investigation ruling out any possibility of looking at alternative causes of the deaths of the victims? Is the forensic bar lower than in an assault or affray case in a Crown Court in the UK? Did they really have such a narrow remit?

PIERS ROBINSON

The original [FFM] team framed it correctly. Then the Office of the Director-General [ODG] appear to have got involved in order to reframe it. It is a problem of manipulation.

JONATHAN STEELE

In the Interim Report, it said there were 'reasonable grounds' for saying chemicals were used as a weapon. There should have been alternative hypotheses put forwards. There should be degrees of probability between competing hypotheses.

PATRICK HENNINGSEN

Doctor McKeigue, have you considered if the identities of the bodies would not have been known to the other inhabitants [of Douma]?

PAUL McKEIGUE

That's one reason why exhumations should have been done, even several months after the incident, if the graves could be located. DNA could still be recovered from bone marrow, and this would have allowed the reconstruction of genetic relationships between the victims and any living relatives who came forward. It would still be worth doing that if the graves could be found.

The only person who has investigated whether neighbours at Location 2 knew the victims is Maxim Grigoriev, head of a Russian NGO The Foundation for the Study of Democracy, who presented his findings at the UN Security Council on Monday evening 20th January 2020. He has reported that people in Douma did not know any of the victims shown in the images, except for one man whose brother reported that he had been killed in an artillery strike. This victim differs from the others in showing signs of blast injury and has an airway in his mouth indicating earlier intervention by a paramedic.

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.21stcenturywire.com/>



## PATRICK HENNINGSEN

You have said the timeline was suspect, given the timing of the uploading of the videos to the internet? But what about the timing of the filming?

## PAUL McKEIGUE

Canadian statistician Steve McIntyre has posted a [detailed study](#)<sup>33</sup> of the images on his blog. The timing of images can be reconstructed from the continuity between recordings, and from cues such as lighting and sun angles. The upload time gives you the latest possible time of recording. When there are many images of the same scene, the sequence and timing can be reconstructed with reasonable accuracy. We estimate that the time of death of the victims could not have been much earlier than about 7 pm: this is based on the timing of post-mortem changes including the settling of red blood cells under gravity (livor mortis), rigor mortis, and eye changes.

## ALEXANDER MERCOURIS

A comment: when Theresa May talks about intelligence we should remember that information obtained by intelligence should not be expected to rise to legal standards of proof. If you act on it you prejudice the conduct of any subsequent investigation. The UK and US launched missile attacks based on intelligence, so the subsequent investigation into the validity of that intelligence came under terrible pressure and has gone terribly wrong.

## PAUL McKEIGUE

US and French officials said that blood samples had tested positive for sarin, but UK officials did not. None of the purported witnesses tested in Turkey had positive blood tests for sarin. Sarin breakdown products were not detected at the scene, and this cannot be attributed to delay in sampling because the main breakdown product – IMPA – persists for hundreds of years. I don't know why the US and French officials got it so wrong, or why this was the one thing that British intelligence did get right.

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<sup>33</sup> <https://www.climateaudit.org/2018/04/24/douma-videos-and-photos/>

## PIERS ROBINSON

The foaming [in the mouths of the victims] was a bit suspect. Shaving foam was mentioned. The intention might have been – if it was staged – to suggest sarin. It might have been a rushed attempt to stage a provocation, and whoever was meant to turn up with sarin didn't quite make it. Some people at the time were reporting that it was sarin.

## TAREQ HADDAD (Writer and Investigative Journalist)

I used to work at Newsweek, but I resigned over this story. From my experience of covering Syria, as the gentleman previously referred to, there is enough evidence to suggest that the Douma incident is not the only case of staging; there is also the case of Khan Shaykhun.

Having studied propaganda in the Iraq War, which motivated me to become a journalist, I was also aware of how misleading information can be used in such a way to influence public opinion to sell the case for war. As we mentioned previously, this [situation in Douma] obviously falls into a bigger remit of what's going on. Lots of people know that there's a lot [in the media] that's inaccurate. Financial interests have taken priority over truth, decency and democracy. I'll give you an example. Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, formerly the head of the British Army's chemical weapons unit, was involved with James le Mesurier [founder of the White Helmets]. Hamish de De Bretton-Gordon is now the head of a British company in Syria which sells gas masks and other similar CBRN equipment to interested parties who go to the scene. He told me that he helps White Helmets to collect evidence of chemical weapons attacks. A big part of the problem is that those involved with intelligence agencies and the military like de Bretton-Gordon have lucrative contracts waiting for them after their service, and therefore have a massive conflict of interests as their products are sold back to our militaries. For a simple example of this conflict of interests, Trump announced in November he wanted to remove troops from Syria. The intelligence community became very angry about this, and troops ended up staying to protect the oil fields. In other words, military contractors who are making a profit in Syria are also the ones dictating our foreign policy. Through think-tanks, their mutual interests are aligned. Journalists also have this relationship to these think-tanks, such as the Council on Foreign Relations, which is why the quality of reporting is so skewed in favour of military aggression, causing our public to be completely misinformed about the conflicts we are entangled in and the state of the world.

## PETER FORD (former UK ambassador to Syria)

I want to pay tribute to those who have set up this meeting, to the Working Group on Syria, Propaganda and Media for its persistent efforts over many months, and to the brave OPCW whistleblowers; we owe them an immense debt.

I would like to add that the OPCW has previous form. The Douma scandal was not stand-alone. Consider Khan Shaykhun. One of the details of that investigation is almost amusing. The Report is 200 pages. Scroll to p. 199 and you will find a footnote revealing that some of the witnesses presented themselves at a hospital on the Turkish border before the alleged incident took place. Such are the levels of duplicity in this conflict.

#### TAREQ HADDAD

Just to add some perspective on why this issue is important, I started investigating the [alleged chemical weapons attack by Turkey](#)<sup>34</sup> [in October 2019].

There was credible evidence that it had used phosphorus. Skin samples were delivered to the OPCW by the Kurdish Red Crescent, yet they refused to take them. Real chemical weapons attacks will not get investigated properly, and there is the risk of the repetition of atrocities, once the OPCW is politicised.

#### SHEILA COOMBES (Frome Stop War)

I sent 200 invitations to this event to MPs – three have attended. Last June I sent the original leak – the Engineering Report leaked to the Working Group on Syria, Propaganda and Media to over 200 MPs. One of the MPs who responded with interest said he would refer to the House of Commons Library for further information; he forwarded their response to me. That response relied heavily on the conclusions made by Bellingcat – only in one small paragraph at the end did it concede that Peter Hitchens of The Mail on Sunday would be revealing more about the leaks. It's wholly shocking to me that Bellingcat analysis is informing MPs and that they appear to rely on it as a trusted source.

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<sup>34</sup><https://www.newsweek.com/turkey-accused-war-crimes-suspected-white-phosphorous-chemical-weapons-use-against-kurds-syria-1466248>

## **CLOSING REMARKS**

JOHN HOLMES

Thanks for listening to so much technical stuff. I hope that we have sowed the seeds of the idea that the Final Report was flawed and misleading.

I'll leave you with a military thought.

When the alleged event happened, my immediate thought was 'why on earth would the Syrian regime carry out a chemical attack when they have won the war?'

You can analyse that for as long as you want, but it's a fair enough question given that the Syrian forces are relatively well disciplined.

[ENDS]