

Syria: The Douma Market Attack outside Damascus: Another Fabricated Pretext for US-NATO Military Intervention?

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The August 16, 2015 attack on a market in the Syrian town of Douma, just outside the capital Damascus, has caused international outrage. Condemnations of the Syrian government have poured in from seemingly all corners of the globe as President Assad and the Syrian military have been declared responsible for the attack, convicted in the court of media opinion. Interestingly, such declarations have come well before any investigation has been conducted, and without any tangible evidence other than the assertions of the rebel spokespersons and anti-government sources. Indeed, there has been an embarrassing dearth of investigative questions asked as corporate media, who have been far from objective these last four and half years, have rushed to fit the facts to their long-standing narrative of "Assad the Butcher."

This author fully understands that, in asking difficult questions, he will be called an "apologist," an "Assad propagandist," or some other such nonsense. Frankly, such name-calling means very little when compared to the suffering of Syrian people, and the untold brutality that will be visited upon them if the western corporate media and warmongers get their way and yet another imperialist so-called intervention is carried out in the name of "humanitarianism." The goal is to ask the right questions, to cast doubt on the already solidifying propaganda narrative that will undoubtedly be used to justify still more war.

Those who work for peace must be prepared to interrogate the received truths of the media machine, to confront head on that which is uncomfortable, and to do so knowing that their motives are just. The victims of this war, both past and future, deserve nothing less.

Questioning the Douma Narrative

When carefully scrutinizing the documentary evidence of the attack, and comparing that to the claims made throughout western media, some troubling irregularities emerge. Not only do the claims seem to be exaggerated, but when placed within the historical context of this war, they seem to fit into a clear pattern of distortion and misinformation disseminated for political purposes, rather than objective reportage. Indeed, the raw footage taken on the scene goes a long way to contradicting some of the claims made by witnesses and "activists" (an interesting term in itself) often quoted in the media.

First, there is the allegation that more than [100 civilians were killed in an airstrike](#) carried out by the Syrian military. There are certainly plenty of pictures that seem to bolster that claim, with debris scattered everywhere, aid workers carrying victims, and frightened civilians rushing around the destroyed marketplace. However, when one looks at the videos,

even those provided by outlets such as The Guardian in the above linked article, one curious thing seems to be missing: bodies.

Indeed, it does seem odd that an airstrike could obliterate a crowded market on a Sunday, killing over a hundred people, and no videos or images would show bodies torn apart by the blast? One would expect to see mangled corpses, limbs scattered on the ground, pools of blood, etc. None of that seems visible.

Compare the Douma videos to those from [Gaza on July 30, 2014](#) during Israel's vicious war. An Israeli airstrike, which killed 15 people and injured more than 150, also hit a crowded market and caused horrific destruction. And in the videos, one sees bloodied bodies missing limbs, pools of blood on the street, and other gut-wrenching images. Or compare the Douma videos to those of the [Christmas 2013 bombing](#) of a crowded Baghdad market. The videos of that attack are gruesome, showing victims with heads partially blown off their bodies, legs attached to bodies by skin alone, lifeless corpses of children and other truly disturbing images.

All of these are conspicuously absent from any of the footage of the airstrike on Douma. Why? The various footage from the scene, repeated on both anti-Assad media (as seen [here](#)), and on mainstream western media (as seen [here](#)), shows no such images. Raw videos taken in the immediate aftermath of the attack also show no bodies (as seen [here](#) and [here](#)). There is [footage showing bodies](#), however there is no discernible evidence that they were victims of the airstrike. Interestingly, all the victims shown in this video were military age males, rather curious if indeed this was an attack on a crowded market where presumably women and children would have been present. Indeed, in the midst of the ongoing war, there are fighters being killed on a daily basis, and it is entirely plausible that the wrapped bodies shown were fighters killed in some other fashion and simply presented to the camera as if they were victims of the airstrike.

To be fair, hours of research did uncover a total of [one video](#), taken after the blast, showing the bodies of a handful of male victims. However, none of the signs of death by airstrike are visible; the bodies are all whole, no missing limbs, very little blood (unlike in the Gaza and Baghdad videos). A logical conclusion based on the available evidence would be that the men seen in the video died from the collapse of a building, presumably the destroyed building behind them.

While impossible to say exactly what happened, there is certainly no definitive evidence of an airstrike as a "deliberate massacre," the argument trumpeted by western media and their Saudi- and Qatari-funded counterparts in the region. An objective examination of the evidence yields the distinct possibility that an airstrike was carried out on a building adjacent to the market. And yet, within hours of the attack, the narrative was seemingly already written: Assad carries out retribution against innocent civilians – a clear war crime.

Another important question that bears close scrutiny has to do with the victims themselves. Naturally, one does not want to make light of anyone killed or wounded in a war, but in trying to discern what is real and what is not, one must closely examine all evidence. And the victim list, as well as the treatment of the bodies raises more questions than it answers.

According to a [list of victims](#) names published in Arabic by the Doumaa Coordinating Committee, a pro-rebel group, there were 102 victims of the airstrike. After a translation, it is clear that the list reveals a grand total of three women among the 102 victims. It strains

credulity that in a crowded market on a Sunday, with an alleged airstrike that could not distinguish between genders, there would be only three women among the dead. How is this possible? It seems likely that, as mentioned above, the list includes dead fighters who may have been killed in some other fashion – in battle, targeted by the Syrian military, etc. – who have simply been added to the list in order to bolster the narrative of a “massacre” in the market.

Additionally, we hear of the burial of victims in mass graves, still another puzzling development. As Reuters [reported](#) the day after the incident:

Sixty bodies were buried on Sunday night in two mass graves, said a spokesman for the Syrian Civil Defense force in Douma, a rescue service operating in rebel-held areas. Another 35 were buried on Monday, and the death toll was over 100, he said. “It was really difficult to identify the bodies of the martyrs. Some of them were burned to the bone, so we couldn’t add them to the documented list,” said the 28-year-old spokesman, who declined to give his real name for security reasons. His house was destroyed in the bombing, he added.

Naturally, the grizzly description given in the article elicits a strong emotional and visceral response. However, there is the troubling question as to why, if the Doumaa Coordinating Committee was able to compile a list of all the victims with their names, so many were still buried unceremoniously in mass graves. Even assuming that the number killed was correct, if it was difficult to identify the bodies with some so badly burned, they still managed to somehow identify them. If one accepts that this is true, then surely these bodies would have been given to the local families for burial. Yet they were not. Why not?

Typically the use of mass graves indicates a desire to quickly hide bodies which, if the media narrative on Douma were true, would seem unnecessary. At the very least, a real investigation into this incident would probe into the use of mass graves for the purposes of hiding key information, namely the identities of those killed.

An alternative theory, one which is supported by the evidence available, is that the Syrian military carried out an airstrike in the rebel stronghold town of Douma, and that the strike hit its target, a building housing a terrorist faction long since known to be in the city. This would explain the preponderance of men among the dead, the need for secrecy in burying the bodies, and the motive for the Syrian military striking the target.

Moreover, it is no secret exactly who has been operating in Douma and why they would be targeted. As the Carnegie Endowment [noted](#) in 2013:

The city of Douma has long been a stronghold of the insurgency, and several armed factions are active in the area, many of them with an Islamist bent. One, the Islam Brigade of the Alloush family, has over time grown quite a bit bigger than the others, particularly after it claimed responsibility for the [July 18, 2012 attack](#) against the National Security Office in Damascus, which killed several leading Syrian security figures. In March 2013, the main factions of the area joined forces in a local body called the [Douma Mujahedin Council](#). The new group included the Islam Brigade, the Douma Martyrs’ Brigade, the Ghouta Lions Brigade, the East Ghouta Revolutionaries’ Brigade, the Lions of God Brigade, the Tawhid al-Islam Brigade, the Farouq Brigade [Liwa al-Farouq], the Shabab al-Hoda Brigade, the Seif al-Omawi Battalions, the Military Police

Battalion, the Regime Protection Battalion, and the al-Ishara Battalion.

This key information is entirely omitted from the western media narrative about what happened in Douma, for obvious reasons. Namely, it undermines the meme that Assad's forces carried out a criminal massacre of civilians as a form of collective punishment. Instead, it bolsters the claims by Syrian military spokespeople that the military targeted terrorist elements inside the city, just as they had done on a number of [previous occasions](#), including as recently as [June 2015](#). This point is critical because it demonstrates that this latest incident is part of an ongoing battle with these Douma factions, one which has seen countless [rockets fired at Damascus from Douma](#) and other surrounding suburbs.

Furthering this point is the fact that this attack in Douma was by no means the only incident of the day. There were in fact a [series of clashes](#) throughout the Damascus suburbs on Sunday August 16, the day of the incident. According to military sources, there were fierce clashes in East Ghouta with both Jaysh al-Islam (Army of Islam) and Faylaq al-Rahman (Al-Rahman Corps) which resulted in 11 Syrian soldiers killed and 21 militants killed. In addition, the city of Harasta, adjacent to Douma, was the scene of major clashes between the army and rebels.

Were one to present all these facts clearly, it becomes inescapable that whatever happened in Douma was part of an ongoing battle between the Syrian military and anti-government "rebels" in control of the town. But that fact is not at all convenient for the war narrative. It presents no justification for an expansion of the international campaign against Syria; it provides no pretext for the US or its allies to invoke their wretched, and utterly discredited, "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine. And ultimately that is the goal.

Exposing the "Humanitarian" Warmongers

The sad fact is that the dead in Douma are little more than props for those who would attempt to orchestrate yet another US-led war in the Middle East. These purported humanitarians would like to transform the incident into viable political currency to expand the war already raging in order to achieve the longed for regime change in Syria that thus far has been unattainable.

Kenneth Roth, Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, has been vocal in his support for a full scale war on Syria in the name of humanitarianism. Roth has repeatedly called for intervention against the legal government of Syria, having recently tweeted statements such as "*Like Sarajevo, could Douma market slaughter finally force Assad to stop targeting civilians?*" (@KenRoth, Aug 16). The implication of the statement is quite clear: there should be military intervention, such as the US-NATO war on Yugoslavia and later Serbia, in order to stop the "slaughter" of civilians. It should be noted that this tweet was posted within hours of the news of the incident in Douma long before any investigation.

Roth, and by extension his organization Human Rights Watch, further discredits whatever vestiges of impartiality he and HRW might have had with inane tweets such as "Douma market killings show how Assad chooses to fight this war: deliberately against civilians," (@KenRoth, Aug 16), an obviously biased, and utterly unsubstantiated allegation. Roth could have absolutely no knowledge of either the identities of the dead, or the Syrian government's motives, when he released the tweet the same day as the attack. He reveals himself here to be little more than a lackey for imperialism, a war hawk masquerading as a human rights defender.

Such dishonesty is nothing new for Roth and HRW however. As this author has [previously argued](#), HRW is an utterly discredited organization that has on multiple occasions published blatantly false allegations about the war in Syria in order to justify a US-NATO intervention. One should of course recall the laughable, and now completely debunked, 2013 report from HRW entitled [Attacks on Ghouta: Analysis of Alleged Use of Chemical Weapons in Syria](#), which falsely claimed that the Syrian government carried out the infamous chemical weapons attack of August 21, 2013.

The report, cited by many of the leading warmongers itching for intervention in Syria, has since been thoroughly discredited by the work of former UN weapons inspector Richard Lloyd and Prof. Theodore Postol of MIT who published their findings in a report entitled [Possible Implications of Faulty US Technical Intelligence in the Damascus Nerve Agent Attack of August 21, 2013](#) which demonstrated unequivocally that the Syrian government could not have carried out the attack.

Additionally, Roth and HRW's false narrative was again obliterated when Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Seymour Hersh published his exposé [The Red Line and the Rat Line](#) which firmly established the fact that the rebels were indeed capable of carrying out the attack on East Ghouta, and that they had help from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and possibly other regional actors. This critical fact completely contradicted the assertions by Roth, HRW and the chorus of others who emphatically declared that only Assad's forces were capable of carrying out the attack. Oops. Sorry Kenny, but your war pretext fell flat that time. One can only hope that it will once again.

But Roth and HRW are not the only ones making spurious claims in pursuit of the war agenda. Leave it to the Nobel Peace Prize winner President Obama and his White House to never let any tragedy go to waste. The day after the attack, National Security Council spokesperson Ned Price, speaking on behalf of the President, issued an [official statement](#) which "strongly condemns the deadly airstrikes yesterday by the Asad regime on a market in the Damascus suburb of Douma, where more than 100 people were killed and hundreds more injured, including scores of innocent women and children... These abhorrent actions underscore that the Asad regime has lost legitimacy and that the international community must do more to enable a genuine political transition."

It is interesting to note here that the White House had already determined that "scores of innocent women and children" had been killed or injured. Where did this information come from? Certainly the casualty list released by the anti-Assad rebels did not indicate scores of dead women and children, nor did any of the videos of incident. It seems that, rather than conveying factual information, the White House was merely using the emotionally charged phrase "women and children" for propagandistic purposes, in order to be able to justify a possible military escalation against Damascus.

It is equally interesting to recall that just like Roth and HRW, the White House attempted to similarly capitalize on the August 21, 2013 chemical weapons attack for the purposes of pushing the US into war on Syria. In its now also debunked [U.S. Government Assessment of the Syrian Government's Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21, 2013](#), the White House stated that "The United States Government assesses with high confidence that the Syrian government carried out a chemical weapons attack in the Damascus suburbs on August 21, 2013. We further assess that the regime used a nerve agent in the attack."Oops again.

But why should this author pick on the August 21, 2013 chemical weapons incident in

attempting to critically examine the recent attack on Douma? Because it was at that moment, in the late summer of 2013, exactly two years ago, that the United States was on the verge of all out war against Syria and the Syrian people; because a narrative built on lies and distortions almost, yet again, pushed the US into war. Because this author marched in Times Square, New York City demanding that there be no war on Syria, then or ever. And because today, with so many lives already lost over these last four and half bloody years in Syria, peace-minded people cannot sit by and allow the US-NATO war machine and its human rights complex toadies to drag us into war.

It is clear that the Douma incident has been portrayed as an “official massacre” not because of any aspect of the attack itself. Rather, it has been presented this way in order to justify a pre-conceived war narrative, one that has repeatedly collapsed in the past, but one which the rapacious warmongers and strategic planners refuse to give up on. It’s not about the dead, nor is it even really about Assad. It is about destroying Syria and achieving geopolitical objectives which have been thus far unattainable due to the stubborn resolve of Damascus and its military. Ultimately, this war is about remaking the Middle East, no matter how many bodies it takes. Sadly, the dead of Douma are little more than tinder to those desperate to set Syria and the region ablaze.

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