

The Western Media is Key to Syria Deceptions, Al Qaeda Propaganda

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By any reckoning, the claim made this week by al-Qaeda-linked fighters that they were [targeted with chemical weapons](#) by the Syrian government in Idlib province – their final holdout in Syria – should have been treated by the western media with a high degree of scepticism.

That the US and other western governments enthusiastically picked up those claims should not have made them any more credible.

Scepticism was all the more warranted from the media given that no physical evidence has yet been produced to corroborate the jihadists' claims. And the media should have been warier still given that the Syrian government was already poised to defeat these al-Qaeda groups without resort to chemical weapons – and without provoking the predictable ire (yet again) of the west.

But most of all scepticism was required because these latest claims arrive just as we have learnt that the last supposed major chemical attack – which took place in April 2018 and was, as ever, blamed by all western sources on Syria's president, Bashar Assad – was very possibly staged, a false-flag operation by those very al-Qaeda groups now claiming the Syrian government has attacked them once again.

Addicted to incompetence

Most astounding in this week's coverage of the claims made by al-Qaeda groups is the fact that the western media continues to refuse to learn any lessons, develop any critical distance from the sources it relies on, even as those sources are shown to have repeatedly deceived it.

Image on the right: Hürriyet Daily News



This was true after the failure to find WMD in Iraq, and it is now even more true after the the international community's monitoring body on chemical weapons, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), was exposed this month as deeply dishonest.

It is bad enough that our governments and our expert institutions deceive and lie to us. But it is even worse that we have a corporate media addicted – at the most charitable interpretation – to its own incompetence. The evidence demonstrating that grows stronger by the day.

Unprovoked attack

In March the OPCW produced a report into a chemical weapons attack the Syrian government allegedly carried out in Douma in April last year. Several dozen civilians, many of them children, died apparently as a result of that attack.

The [OPCW report](#) concluded that there were “reasonable grounds” for believing a toxic form of chlorine had been used as a chemical weapon in Douma, and that the most likely method of delivery were two cylinders dropped from the air.

This as good as confirmed claims made by al-Qaeda groups, backed by western states, that the cylinders had been dropped by the Syrian military. Using dry technical language, the OPCW joined the US and Europe in pointing the finger squarely at Assad.

It was vitally important that the OPCW reached that conclusion not only because of the west's overarching regime-change ambitions in Syria.

In response to the alleged Douma attack a year ago, the US [fired a volley of Cruise missiles](#) at Syrian army and government positions before there had been any investigation of who was responsible.

Those missiles were already a war crime – an unprovoked attack on another sovereign country. But without the OPCW's implicit blessing, the US would have been deprived of even its flimsy, humanitarian pretext for launching the missiles.

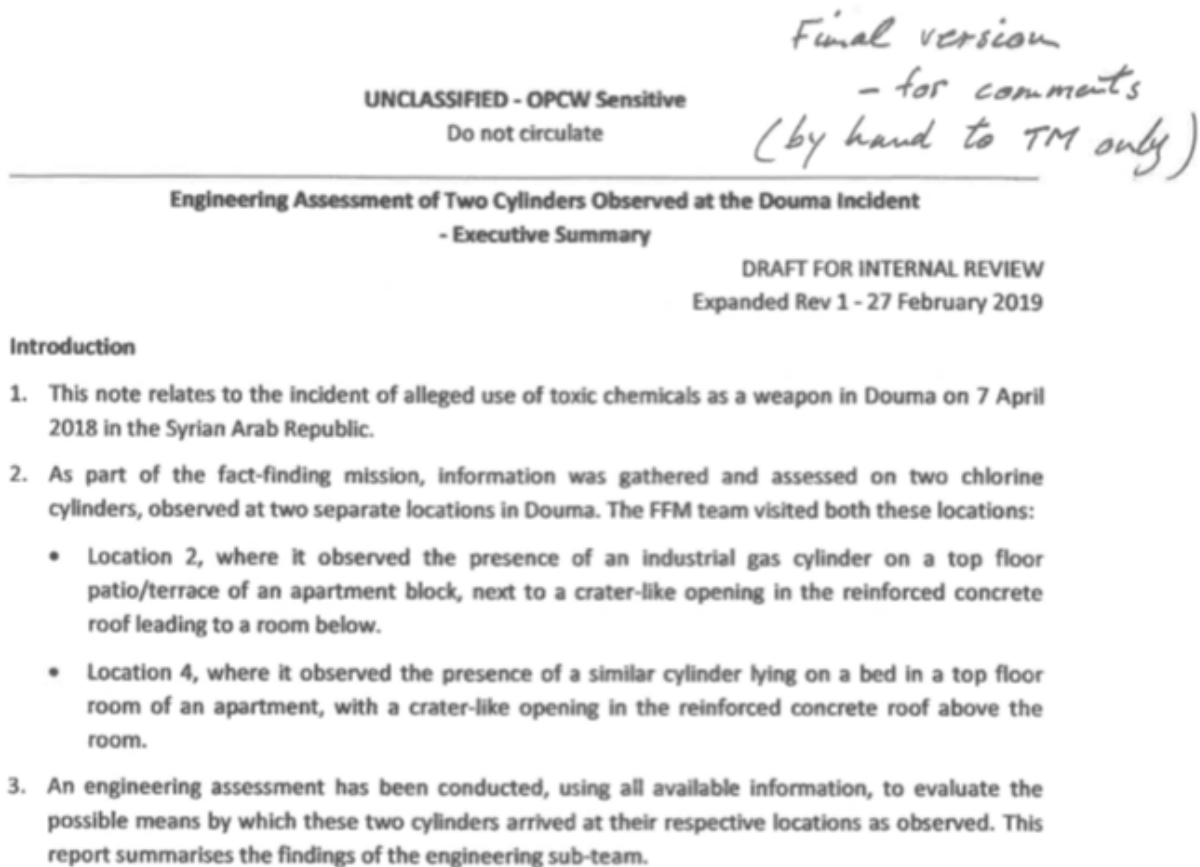
Leaked document

Undoubtedly the OPCW was under huge political pressure to arrive at the “right” conclusion. But as a scientific body carrying out a forensic investigation surely it would not simply doctor the data.

Nonetheless, it seems that may well be precisely what it did. This month the Working Group

on Syria, Propaganda and Media – a group of academics who have grown increasingly sceptical of the western narratives told about Syria – [published](#) an internal, leaked OPCW document.

A few days later the OPCW [reluctantly confirmed](#) that the document was genuine, and that it would identify and deal with those responsible for the leak.



The document was an assessment overseen by Ian Henderson, a senior OPCW expert, of the engineering data gathered by the OPCW’s fact-finding mission that attended the scene of the Douma attack. Its findings fly in the face of the OPCW’s published report.

Erased from the record

The leaked document is deeply troubling for two reasons.

First, the assessment, based on the available technical data, contradicts the conclusion of the final OPCW report that the two chemical cylinders were dropped from the air and crashed through building roofs. It argues instead that the cylinders were more likely placed at the locations they were found.

If that is right, the most probable explanation is that the cylinders were put there by al-Qaeda groups – presumably in a last desperate effort to persuade the west to intervene and to prevent the jihadists being driven out of Douma.

But even more shocking is the fact that the expert assessment based on the data collected by the OPCW team is entirely unaddressed in the OPCW’s final report.

It is not that the final report discounts or rebuts the findings of its own experts. It simply

ignores those findings; it pretends they don't exist. The report blacks them out, erases them from the official record. In short, it perpetrates a massive deception.

Experts ignored

All of this would be headline news if we had a responsible media that cared about the truth and about keeping its readers informed.

We now know both that the US attacked Syria on entirely bogus grounds, and that the OPCW – one of the international community's most respected and authoritative bodies – has been caught redhanded in an outrageous deception with grave geopolitical implications. (In fact, it is not the first time the OPCW has been caught doing this, as I have previously explained [here](#).)

The fact that the OPCW ignored its own expert and its own team's technical findings when they proved politically indigestible casts a dark shadow over *all* the OPCW's work in Syria, and beyond. If it was prepared to perpetrate a deception on this occasion, why should we assume it did not do so on other occasions when it proved politically expedient?

Active combatants

The OPCW's reports into other possible chemical attacks – assisting western efforts to implicate Assad – are now equally tainted. That is especially so given that in those other cases the OPCW violated its own procedures by drawing prejudicial conclusions without its experts being on the ground, at the site of the alleged attacks. Instead it received samples and photos via al-Qaeda groups, who could easily have tampered with the evidence.

And yet there has been not a peep from the corporate media about this exposure of the OPCW's dishonesty, apart from commentary pieces from the only two maverick mainstream journalists in the UK – [Peter Hitchens](#), a conservative but independent-minded columnist for the Mail on Sunday, and veteran war correspondent [Robert Fisk](#), of the little-read Independent newspaper (more on his special involvement in Douma in a moment).

Just as the OPCW blanked the findings of its technical experts to avoid political discomfort, the media have chosen to stay silent on this new, politically sensitive information.

They have preferred to prop up the discredited narrative that our governments have been acting to protect the human rights of ordinary Syrians rather than the reality that they have been active combatants in the war, helping to destabilise a country in ways that have caused huge suffering and death in Syria.

Systematic failure

This isn't a one-off failure. It's part of a series of failures by the corporate media in its coverage of Douma.

They ignored very obvious grounds for caution at the time of the alleged attack. Award-winning reporter Robert Fisk was among the first journalists to enter Douma shortly after those events. He and a few independent reporters communicated [eye-witness testimony](#) that flatly contradicted the joint narrative promoted by al-Qaeda groups and western governments that Assad had bombed Douma with chemical weapons.

The corporate media also [mocked](#) a subsequent press conference at which many of the supposed victims of that alleged chemical attack made appearances to show that they were unharmed and spoke of how they had been coerced into play-acting their roles.

And now the western media has compounded that failure - revealing its systematic nature - by ignoring the leaked OPCW document too.

But it gets worse, far worse.

Al-Qaeda propaganda

This week the same al-Qaeda groups that were present in Douma - and may have staged that lethal attack - claimed that the Syrian government had again launched chemical weapons against them, this time on their final holdout in Idlib.

A responsible media, a media interested in the facts, in evidence, in truth-telling, in holding the powerful to account, would be dutybound to frame this latest, unsubstantiated claim in the context of the new doubts raised about the OPCW report into last year's chemical attack blamed on Assad.

Given that the technical data suggest that al-Qaeda groups, and the White Helmets who work closely with them, were responsible for staging the attack - even possibly of murdering civilians to make the attack look more persuasive - the corporate media had a professional and moral obligation to raise the matter of the leaked document.

It is vital context as anyone tries to weigh up whether the latest al-Qaeda claims are likely to be true. To deprive readers of this information, this essential context would be to take a side, to propagandise on behalf not only of western governments but of al-Qaeda too.

And that is exactly what the corporate media have just done. All of them.

Media worthy of Stalin

It is clear how grave their dereliction of the most basic journalistic duty is if we consider the Guardian's uncritical coverage of jihadist claims about the latest alleged chemical attack.

Like most other media, the Guardian [article](#) included two strange allusions - one by France, the other by the US - to the deception perpetrated by the OPCW in its recent Douma report. The Guardian reported these allusions even though it has never before uttered a word anywhere in its pages about that deception.

In other words, the corporate media are so committed to propagandising on behalf of the western powers that they have reported the *denials* of official wrongdoing even though they have never reported the *actual wrongdoing*. It is hard to imagine the Soviet media under Stalin behaving in such a craven and dishonest fashion.

The corporate media have given France and the US a platform to reject accusations against the OPCW that the media themselves have never publicly raised.

Doubts about OPCW

The following is a brief statement (unintelligible without the forgoing context) from

France, [reported](#) by the Guardian in relation to the latest claim that Assad's forces used chemical weapons this week: "We have full confidence in the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons."

But no one, except bloggers and academics ignored by the media and state authorities, has ever raised doubts about the OPCW. Why would the Guardian think these French comments worthy of reporting unless there were reasons to doubt the OPCW? And if there are such reasons for doubt, why has the Guardian not thought to make them public, to report them to its readers?

The US state department similarly came to the aid of the OPCW. In the same Guardian report, a US official was quoted saying that the OPCW was facing "a continuing disinformation campaign" from Syria and Russia, and that the campaign was designed "to create the false narrative that others [rather than Assad] are to blame for chemical weapons attacks".

So Washington too was rejecting accusations against the OPCW that have never been reported by the state-corporate media.

Interestingly, in the case of US officials, they claim that Syria and Russia are behind the "disinformation campaign" against the OPCW, even though the OPCW has admitted that the leaked document discrediting its work is genuine and written by one of its experts.

The OPCW is discredited, of course, only because it sought to conceal evidence contained in the leaked document that might have exonerated Assad of last year's chemical attack. It is hard to see how Syria or Russia can be blamed for this.

Colluding in deception

But more astounding still, while US and French officials have at least acknowledged that there are doubts about the OPCW's role in Syria, even if they unjustifiably reject such doubts, the corporate media have simply ignored those doubts as though they don't exist.

The continuing media blackout on the leaked OPCW document cannot be viewed as accidental. It has been systematic across the media.

That blackout has remained resolutely in place even after the OPCW admitted the leaked document discrediting it was genuine and even after western countries began alluding to the leaked document themselves.

The corporate media is actively colluding both in the original deception perpetrated by al-Qaeda groups and the western powers, and in the subsequent dishonesty of the OPCW. They have worked together to deceive western publics.

The question is, why are the media so obviously incompetent? Why are they so eager to keep themselves and their readers in the dark? Why are they so willing to advance credulous narratives on behalf of western governments that have been repeatedly shown to have lied to them?

Iran the real target

The reason is that the corporate media are not what they claim. They are not a watchdog on

power, or a fourth estate.

The media are actually the public relations wing of a handful of giant corporations – and states – that are pursuing two key goals in the Middle East.

First, they want to control its oil. Helping al-Qaeda in Syria – including in its propaganda war – against the Assad government serves a broader western agenda. The US and NATO bloc are ultimately gunning for the leadership of Iran, the one major oil producer in the region not under the US imperial thumb.

Powerful Shia groups in the region – Assad in Syria, Hizbullah in Lebanon, and Iraqi leaders elevated by our invasion of that country in 2003 – are allies or potential allies of Iran. If they are in play, the US empire's room for manoeuvre in taking on Iran is limited. Remove these smaller players and Iran stands isolated and vulnerable.

That is why Russia stepped in several years ago to save Assad, in a bid to stop the dominoes falling and the US engineering a third world war centred on the Middle East.

Second, with the Middle East awash with oil money, western corporations have a chance to sell more of the lucrative weapons that get used in overt and covert wars like the one raging in Syria for the past eight years.

What better profit-generator for these corporations than wasteful and pointless wars against manufactured bogeymen like Assad?

Like a death cult

From the outside, this looks and sounds like a conspiracy. But actually it is something worse – and far more difficult to overcome.

The corporations that run our media and our governments have simply conflated in their own minds – and ours – the idea that their narrow corporate interests are synonymous with “western interests”.

The false narratives they generate are there to serve a system of power, as I have explained in [previous blogs](#). That system's worldview and values are enforced by a charmed circle that includes politicians, military generals, scientists, journalists and others operating as if brainwashed by some kind of death cult. They see the world through a single prism: the system's need to hold on to power. Everything else – truth, evidence, justice, human rights, love, compassion – must take a back seat.

It is this same system that paradoxically is determined to preserve itself even if it means destroying the planet, ravaging our economies, and starting and maintaining endlessly destructive wars. It is system that will drag us all into the abyss, unless we stop it.

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