

OPCW Investigator Testifies At UN That No Chemical Attack Took Place In Douma, Syria

By Ben Borton, via TheGrayZone and Zerohedge, 25 January 2020

In testimony before the United Nations Security Council, former OPCW inspection team leader and engineering expert Ian Henderson stated that their investigation in Douma, Syria suggested no chemical attack took place. But their findings were suppressed.

A former lead investigator from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has spoken out at the United Nations, stating in no uncertain terms that the scientific evidence suggests there was no gas attack in Douma, Syria in April 2018.

The dissenter, Ian Henderson, worked for 12 years at the international watchdog organization, serving as an inspection team leader and engineering expert. Among his most consequential jobs was assisting the international body's fact-finding mission (FFM) on the ground in Douma.

He told a UN Security Council session convened on January 20 by Russia's delegation that OPCW management had rejected his group's scientific research, dismissed the team, and produced another report that totally contradicted their initial findings.

"We had serious misgivings that a chemical attack had occurred," Henderson said, referring to the FFM team in Douma.

The former OPCW inspector added that he had **compiled evidence through months of research that "provided further support for the view that there had not been a chemical attack."**

A former OPCW inspection team leader and engineering expert told the UN Security Council that their investigation in Douma, Syria suggested no chemical attack took place. But their findings were suppressed and reversed

Read more here: <https://thegrayzone.com/2020/01/22/ian-henderson-opcw-whistleblower-un-no-chemical-attack-douma-syria/> ...

Western airstrikes based on unsubstantiated allegations by foreign-backed jihadists

Foreign-backed Islamist militants and the **Western government-funded** regime-change influence operation known as the **White Helmets** accused the Syrian government of dropping gas cylinders and killing dozens of people in the city of Douma on April 7, 2018. Damascus rejected the accusation, claiming the incident was staged by the insurgents.

At the time, Douma was controlled by the extremist Salafi-jihadist militia **Jaysh al-Islam**, which was **created and funded by Saudi Arabia** and formerly allied with Syria's powerful al-Qaeda affiliate **Jabhat al-Nusra**.

The governments of the United States, Britain, and France responded to the allegations of a chemical attack by launching airstrikes against the Syrian government on April 14. The military assault was illegal under international law, as the countries did not have UN authorization.

Numerous OPCW whistleblowers and leaks challenge Western government claims

In May 2019, an internal [OPCW engineering assessment](#) was leaked to the public. The document, authored by Ian Henderson, said the “dimensions, characteristics and appearance of the cylinders” in Douma “were inconsistent with what would have been expected in the case of either cylinder having been delivered from an aircraft,” adding that there is “a higher probability that both cylinders were manually placed at those two locations rather than being delivered from aircraft.”

After reviewing the leaked report, MIT professor emeritus of Science, Technology and International Security Theodore Postol told The Grayzone, “The evidence is overwhelming that the gas attacks were staged.” Postol also accused OPCW leadership of overseeing “compromised reporting” and [ignoring scientific evidence](#).

In November, a second OPCW whistleblower came forward and accused the organization’s leadership of [suppressing countervailing evidence](#), under [pressure by three US government officials](#).

[WikiLeaks](#) has published numerous internal emails from the OPCW that reveal allegations that the body’s management staff doctored the Douma report.

As the evidence of internal suppression grew, the OPCW’s first director-general, José Bustani, decided to speak out. “The convincing evidence of irregular behavior in the OPCW investigation of the alleged Douma chemical attack confirms doubts and suspicions I already had,” Bustani stated.

“I could make no sense of what I was reading in the international press. Even official reports of investigations seemed incoherent at best. The picture is certainly clearer now, although very disturbing,” the former OPCW head concluded.

OPCW whistleblower testimony at UN Security Council meeting on Douma

On January 20, 2020, Ian Henderson delivered his first in-person testimony, alleging suppression by OPCW leadership. He spoke at a UN Security Council [Arria-Formula meeting](#) on the fact-finding mission report on Douma.

(Video of the session follows at the bottom of this article, along with a full transcript of Henderson’s testimony.)

China’s mission to the UN invited Ian Henderson to testify in person at the Security Council session. Henderson said in his testimony that he had planned to attend, but was unable to get a visa waiver from the US government. (The Trump administration has repeatedly blocked access to the UN for representatives from countries that do not kowtow to its interests, turning [UN visas into a political weapon](#) in blatant violation of the international body’s [headquarters agreement](#).)

Henderson told the Security Council in a pre-recorded video message that he was not the only OPCW inspector to question the leadership’s treatment of the Douma investigation.

“My concern, which was shared by a number of other inspectors, relates to the subsequent management lockdown and the practices in the later analysis and compilation of a final report,” Henderson explained.

Soon after the alleged incident in Douma in April 2018, the OPCW FFM team had deployed to the ground to carry out an investigation, which it noted included environmental samples, interviews with witnesses, and data collection.

In July 2018, the FFM published its [interim report](#), stating that it found no evidence of chemical weapons use in Douma. (“The results show that no organophosphorous nerve agents or their degradation products were detected in the environmental samples or in the plasma samples taken from alleged casualties,” the report indicated.)

“By the time of release of the interim report in July 2018, our understanding was that we had serious misgivings that a chemical attack had occurred,” Henderson told the Security Council.

After this inspection that led to the interim report, however, Henderson said the OPCW leadership decided to create a new team, “the so-called FFM core team, which essentially resulted in the dismissal of all of the inspectors who had been on the team deployed to locations in Douma and had been following up with their findings and analysis.”

Then in March 2019, this new OPCW team released a final report, in which it claimed that chemical weapons had been used in Douma.

“The findings in the final FFM report were contradictory, were a complete turnaround with what the team had understood collectively during and after the Douma deployments,” Henderson remarked at the UN session.

“The report did not make clear what new findings, facts, information, data, or analysis in the fields of witness testimony, toxicology studies, chemical analysis, and engineering, and/or ballistic studies had resulted in the complete turn-around in the situation from what was understood by the majority of the team, and the entire Douma [FFM] team, in July 2018,” Henderson stated.

*The former OPCW expert added, “I had followed up with a further six months of engineering and ballistic studies into these cylinders, **the result of which had provided further support for the view that there had not been a chemical attack.**”*

US government pressure on the OPCW

The US government responded to this historic testimony at the UN session by attacking Russia, which [sponsored](#) the Arria-Formula meeting.

Acting US representative [Cherith Norman Chalet](#) praised the OPCW, aggressively condemned the “Assad regime,” and told the UN that the “United States is proud to support the vital, life-saving work of the White Helmets” – a US and UK-backed organization that collaborated extensively with ISIS and al-Qaeda and have been [involved in numerous executions](#) in Syrian territory occupied by [Islamist extremists](#).

The US government has a long history of pressuring and manipulating the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. During the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, the George W. Bush administration threatened José Bustani, the first director of the OPCW, and pressured him to resign.

In 2002, as the Bush White House was preparing to wage a war on Iraq, Bustani made an agreement with the Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein that would have permitted OPCW inspectors to come to the country unannounced for weapons investigations. This infuriated the US government.

Then-Under Secretary of State [John Bolton](#) told Bustani in 2002 that US Vice President Dick “[Cheney wants you out.](#)” Bolton threatened the OPCW director-general, stating, “You have 24 hours to leave the organization, and if you don’t comply with this decision by Washington, we have ways to retaliate against you... We know where your kids live.”

Attacking the credibility of Ian Henderson

While OPCW managers have kept curiously silent amid the scandal over their Douma report, an interventionist media outlet called Bellingcat has functioned as an outsourced press shop, aggressively defending the official narrative and attacking its most prominent critics, including Ian Henderson.

Bellingcat is **funded** by the US government's regime-change arm, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and is part of an initiative bankrolled by the British Foreign Office. Following Henderson's testimony, **Bellingcat founder Eliot Higgins** tried to besmirch the former OPCW engineer's credibility by implying he was being **used by Russia**. Until 2019, Higgins worked at the **Atlantic Council**, a pro-war think tank **financed by the American and British governments**, as well as by NATO.

Supporters of the OPCW's apparently doctored final report have relied heavily on Bellingcat to try to discredit the whistleblowers and growing leaks. Scientific expert Theodor Postol, who debated Higgins, has **noted that Bellingcat "have no scientific credibility at any level."** Postol says he even suspects that OPCW management may have relied on Bellingcat's highly dubious claims in its own compromised reporting.

Higgins has no expertise or scientific credentials, and even **The New York Times** acknowledged in a highly sympathetic piece that "Higgins attributed his skill not to any special knowledge of international conflicts or digital data, but to the hours he had spent playing video games, which, he said, gave him the idea that any mystery can be cracked."

In his testimony before the UN Security Council, Ian Henderson stressed that he was speaking out in line with his duties as a scientific expert.

Henderson said he does not even like the term whistleblower and would not use it to describe himself, because, "I'm a former OPCW specialist who has concerns in an area, and I consider this a legitimate and appropriate forum to explain again these concerns."

Russia's UN representative added that Moscow had also invited the OPCW director-general and representatives of the organization's Technical Secretariat, but they chose not to participate in the session.

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Video of the UN Security Council session on the OPCW's Douma report

Ian Henderson's testimony begins at 57:30 in this official UN video:

Transcript: Testimony by OPCW whistleblower Ian Henderson at the UN Security Council

"My name is Ian Henderson. I'm a former OPCW inspection team leader, having served for about 12 years. I heard about this meeting and I was invited by the minister, councilor of the Chinese mission to the UN. Unfortunately due to unforeseen circumstances around my ESTA visa waiver status, I was not able to travel. I thus submitted a written statement, to which I will now add a short introduction.

I need to point out at the outset that I'm not a whistleblower; I don't like that term. I'm a former OPCW specialist who has concerns in an area, and I consider this a legitimate and appropriate forum to explain again these concerns.

Secondly, I must point out that I hold the OPCW in the highest regard, as well as the professionalism of the staff members who work there. The organization is not broken; I must stress that. However the concern I have does relate to some specific management practices in certain sensitive missions.

The concern of course relates to the FFM investigation into the alleged chemical attack on the 7th of April in Douma, in Syria. My concern, which was shared by a number of other inspectors, relates to the subsequent management lockdown and the practices in the later analysis and compilation of a final report.

There were two teams deployed; one team, which I joined shortly after the start of field deployments, was to Douma in Syria; the other team deployed to country X.

The main concern relates to the announcement in July 2018 of a new concept, the so-called FFM core team, which essentially resulted in the dismissal of all of the inspectors who had

been on the team deployed to locations in Douma and had been following up with their findings and analysis.

The findings in the final FFM report were contradictory, were a complete turnaround with what the team had understood collectively during and after the Douma deployments. And by the time of release of the interim report in July 2018, our understanding was that we had serious misgivings that a chemical attack had occurred.

What the final FFM report does not make clear, and thus does not reflect the views of the team members who deployed to Douma — in which case I really can only speak for myself at this stage — the report did not make clear what new findings, facts, information, data, or analysis in the fields of witness testimony, toxicology studies, chemical analysis, and engineering, and/or ballistic studies had resulted in the complete turn-around in the situation from what was understood by the majority of the team, and the entire Douma team, in July 2018.

In my case, I had followed up with a further six months of engineering and ballistic studies into these cylinders, the result of which had provided further support for the view that there had not been a chemical attack.

This needs to be properly resolved, we believe through the rigors of science and engineering. In my situation, it's not a political debate. I'm very aware that there is a political debate surrounding this.

Perhaps a closing comment from my side is that I was also the inspection team leader who developed and launched the inspections, the highly intrusive inspections, of the Barzah SSRC facility, just outside Damascus. And I did the inspections and wrote the reports for the two inspections prior to, and the inspection after the chemical facility, or the laboratory complex at Barzah SSRC, had been destroyed by the missile strike.

That, however, is another story altogether, and I shall now close. Thank you.”