

A Challenge to the Syria Chlorine Allegations Accepted by OPCW and U.N. Commission of Inquiry

By Adam Larson

13 March, 2017

The alleged chlorine gas attacks blamed on the Syrian government over the last three years keep coming up. These were most recently addressed by the United Nations Commission of Inquiry (CoI) document A/HRC/34/64, of 2 February, 2017, and by member states in a draft resolution dated 7 March 2017, for the U.N. Human Rights Council on “The human rights situation in the Syrian Arab Republic” (both reports are circulating but not publicly available). For all concerned parties, at the request of and via eco-peace activist Marinella Correggia of Italy, I offer the following serious questions about these allegations, based on critically analyzed open-source information.

Original Chlorine Questions: General, 2014-2015

I refer to my submission of August 24, 2015 to the Organization for Prohibition of Chemical weapons (OPCW), as they set to work looking into alleged CW attacks in Syria, for the first time with an eye to assigning blame. I've attached the exact submission I sent, rushed and with several typographical errors, but a slightly improved public version is also available online. ¹ The attachments referred to in that are in a collection of the cited articles I've written. ² The OPCW had this information for a year before their first report, and can be pressed on why they seem to ignore it.

I didn't know if the probe would include the earlier alleged sarin attacks, so I covered these as well as the more recent chlorine attacks. In the end, the OPCW chose to focus only on the more recent allegations; chlorine gas dropped from government helicopters, and mustard gas usage by Islamic State. So last year, as the organization released its findings in August/September, I publicized my submission along with an article: "Terrible Flaws in OPCW's Syria Chlorine Investigation." This highlighted the findings I informed them of, and expanded on the relevant portion. ³ The following are some of the main points raised therein:

- Chlorine is an illogical weapon; in the quantities used, it's likely to kill few if any. Even the

1 http://ciwclibya.org/images/OPCW_Final_2016_Revision.pdf

2 http://ciwclibya.org/images/OPCW_Attachments.pdf

3 <http://libyancivilwar.blogspot.com/2016/08/terrible-flaws-in-opcws-syria-chlorine.html>

small numbers of dead that we see is likely higher than it should be. There's no clear advantage to sowing alleged terror and panic, as activists describe the motive, and also little reason for these alleged reactions.

– Helicopters are generally claimed to drop these bombs, proving government guilt (only they, probably, could field helicopters), and disproving any origin with the opposition, for whom, of course, chlorine is also freely available, even if they probably can't do much helicopter flying (they have at times owned some). Rebels have been actively gassing Syrian soldiers with chlorine, at least by credible reports, since December, 2012. ⁴ However, the crucial helicopter link has never to my knowledge been proven by clear video. The role of a helicopter is open to question down the line.

– This gas is almost always, allegedly, used against innocent civilians, and that can't be accidental. Barrel bombs, or any gravity-driven weapons dropped from a hovering helicopter, are as accurate as the craft's positioning system; the bomb will fall straight down on or very near the target. If not specific homes, residential areas must be targeted each time. It's possible, but illogical, that any government would choose to do this to its own people over and over; there's no clear motive, except maybe to make themselves look bad.

– Chlorine allegations are convenient from a regime-change perspective: one cannot give up chlorine like one can sarin, so it's easy to conclude that the government itself will have to go if their alleged chlorine attacks are to stop.

– Three of the four deadly 2014 attacks in Hama and Idlib provinces reportedly targeted displaced families, killing them away from their hometowns and sparing locals, as well as fighters. This is strange but very common across different types of alleged government attacks, and might mean **they were held as hostages**.

– The alleged chlorine barrel bomb design used in the 2015 attacks is highly illogical. The OPCW and its activist sources claim that precursors (potassium permanganate and hydrochloric acid) were held separately, then mixed upon impact. But the violence of the landing would probably disrupt the process and yield virtually no chlorine, even barring an outright explosion. ⁵

Original Chlorine Questions: Sarmin

– (Continuing from the last point) In several cases, there is a purple-red fluid at the alleged

4 http://acloserlookonsyria.shoutwiki.com/wiki/Alleged_Chemical_Attack,_December_22,_2012

5 http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/738 page 80, and leaked illustration: <http://acloserlookonsyria.shoutwiki.com/wiki/File:OPCW-20151029-Barrel-bomb-graph.jpg>

barrel-bomb attack sites that suggests such precursors were mixed there. But evidence suggests they were probably mixed manually in large quantities. Minus the disruptive force of impact or explosion, this could work quite well to turn a basement apartment into a gas chamber. This would be done by people on the ground carrying plastic jugs of the materials. ⁶

– One such case is the pivotal and highly dubious incident of March 16, 2015 in Sarmin, Idlib province. How the fluid there correlates with the building damage and alleged barrel bomb remnants, which suggest an explosive impact, is still a matter to fully resolve. But it's not at all clear it lines up the way activists allege.

– This attack in Sarmin reportedly killed a family of six named Taleb (grandmother, father, mother, and three young children aged about 1-3.) By most accounts, the grandmother was dead on arrival, while the parents were able to speak and give details, but then died. One girl died before the emergency room, and the other two children seem to slowly die there, on videos credited to Jabhat al-Nusra and the “White Helmets,” seeming to work in shifts.

– The children at least were probably never in that puddle-filled apartment; they display **no chlorine indicators**. These include skin irritation, eye damage (from bloodshot and watering to swollen and half-dissolved), and cyanosis (a blue shift in the blood and hence skin, especially at the lips), with victims conscious, agitated, struggling to breathe and coughing, perhaps emitting blood or mucous, and possibly therefore “foaming at the mouth.” (The core mechanism is the gas forming corrosive acid on contact with water, like in the eyes and lungs). The grandmother may have chlorine signs (she's red in the face and maybe the eyes), while the father isn't seen clearly enough, and the mother isn't shown at all. But the children display none of these signs (aside from mild cyanosis), and in fact look roughly the opposite of how they should.

– Instead of chlorine, the clinical signs suggest the children, among a few other possibilities, may have suffered **an overdose with a CNS depressant (opiates, barbiturates, etc.)**. They appear dead, but one seen breath attempt and a claim of a pulse suggest at least two of the three children were alive, so comatose. They're limp and totally unresponsive (we can't say if they were conscious or not), with white, rheumy, vacant eyes, and evenly pale skin. They don't cough at all, and barely even breathe. The boy apparently spits up, as an overdose or being an infant can cause, and therefore is the only one to “foam at the mouth” a bit when he also manages some shallow breaths.)

– A drug overdose would clearly be done by people on the ground, and not by a passing

⁶ <http://libyancivilwar.blogspot.com/2016/08/terrible-flaws-in-opcws-syria-chlorine.html> The same method was apparently used to kill two test rabbits in a December, 2012 video by Islamists, promising the same fate to Syria's Alawites: http://acloserlookonsyria.shoutwiki.com/wiki/Tekkim_Chemical_Test_Video#The_Poison_Used

helicopter. The children are seen outside before the clinic, already comatose. Therefore, they were poisoned before they arrived at this clinic, which Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) proudly supplied. Still, the murder weapon may have come from the MSF-stocked shelves of the Sarmin clinic, perhaps taken out on loan to local friends.

– Further, medical negligence seems to have sealed the fate of these children. Little Mohamed had a giant syringe poked around in his chest, but it seems the apparent dose of adrenaline in it was never injected, and the doctor did this just for show, not to re-start the boy's heart. ⁷ That would hardly matter anyway without respiratory support, which he was not given, aside from some much-delayed suction, and so he died suffocating on his own fluids. ⁸ As outlandish as it might sound, it seems likely the clinic operators wanted these children to die, so they could blame “Assad” and demand protection.

– There are grave story inconsistencies here as well, suggesting poor co-ordination between fictional accounts:

– The OPCW reported in one spot how the parents and the youngest child escaped the house and got help for the others, before they all died from their varying exposure. ⁹ Elsewhere, the parents “and the *oldest (male)* child managed to escape to the open air” (emphasis mine) while “the interviewees confirmed that the grandmother and the two daughters,” who remained trapped for over 30 minutes, “were dead on arrival at the hospital.” ¹⁰ Video clarifies the boy was the youngest child, so OPCW heard he and the parents are the ones who escaped.. But in the prevailing narrative given to Amnesty International and others, the grandmother tried to flee but passed out on the stairs, as everyone else remained paralyzed inside, and all were found right there long afterwards. ¹¹

– The director of the field hospital the children died in, Dr. Mohamed Tenari, has changed his story on the victims. He originally told MSF (which supported the facility) the family of six that died was unknown, “arriving at the hospital from a neighbouring village,” barely able to speak before they died. ¹² But everyone else says they lived in Sarmin, at a home geolocated to the eastern edge of town. Later, Dr. Tennari agreed and added that the father, his “friend” Waref al-Taleb, “ran

7 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nj6fc69qjM>

8 <http://libyancivilwar.blogspot.com/2015/04/what-killed-talebs.html>

9 http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/738 page 84

10 http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2015_908.pdf

11 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/03/syria-war-crime-chlorine-gas-attack/>

12 <http://www.msf.org.uk/article/syria-chlorine-attack-on-idlib-village>

an electronics repair shop in town,”¹³ and even had “recently helped to fix my phone.”¹⁴

– Furthermore, while video shows Dr. Tennari was *not present* during the failed efforts to save the Taleb children, he claims he was there, heading the operation and being sickened by the fumes rising from their naked and washed bodies (which is a patently nonsensical claim).¹⁵ There are further questions about Dr. Tennari, his oft-destroyed clinic, his handling of finances, and more that are beyond the scope of this letter. But the issues covered are enough to question his credibility, and that of some others who have provided the stories accepted, so far, at the U.N. and OPCW.

– The U.S. ambassador to the U.N., Samantha Power, called a closed-door UNSC session in April, 2015 to raise the chlorine charges. For this, she had Dr. Tennari show this same video footage - disproving chlorine, suggesting murder, and excluding himself - as he narrated his story one more time for assembled diplomats. Ambassador Power said this moved everyone to tears (“if there was a dry eye in the room I didn't see it”) and underscored how the “long arm of justice” was “taking more time than any of us would wish right now.”¹⁶ However true that assessment was, it sounds like there was some acceptance of this story and little challenge to it at the time. But while these are *officially* victims of Syria's chlorine attacks, we can see that they *actually* aren't, and that instead, someone on the ground poisoned them and then lodged false stories. This is highly important if true. It needs to be verified by credible experts and, if warranted, exposed for the murderous fraud it is.

Scattered Question Marks, 2015-2016

Including that highly suspect incident in Sarmin, there were at least 13 alleged chlorine attacks in Idlib province over exactly two months (March 16 to May 15, 2015), reportedly killing a total of 10 civilians. Then over the following 15 months, there were scattered CW attacks alleged across Syria, by both sides. In most cases, the poison blamed remains unclear on my end; not all are certain to be the same. There was at least one chlorine attack specified in Jobar, Damascus in July, blamed on government forces during clashes over a water-pumping station.¹⁷

The next clear entry came on April 7, 2016, when the Islamist opposition group Jaish al-Islam (JaI) launched a chlorine attack in Sheikh Maqsood, Aleppo, killing several Kurdish fighters. JaI said it was an unauthorized use of their admitted CW stocks, and would be punished.¹⁸ (The same

13 https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/17/world/middleeast/un-security-council-sees-video-evidence-of-a-chemical-attack-in-syria.html?_r=0

14 <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA00/20150617/103638/HHRG-114-FA00-Wstate-TennariM-20150617.pdf>

15 <http://libyancivilwar.blogspot.com/2015/06/syria-chlorine-allegations-where-was-dr.html>

16 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32346790>

17 <http://libyancivilwar.blogspot.com/2015/07/syria-chlorine-allegations-east-ghouta.html>

18 http://acloserlookonsyria.shoutwiki.com/wiki/Alleged_Chemical_Attack,_April_7,_2016

district had reportedly been hit by rebels, less than a month earlier, with suspected yellow phosphorous.)¹⁹

Then the government-held part of Aleppo's Old City saw a chlorine rocket attack on August 2, said to be launched by Harakat Nouraddin al-Zenki. This plus a preceding incident killed a total of 13 people (civilians, soldiers, and rescuers). A firefighter who died is shown in photos bearing signs of severe chlorine exposure: cyanosis, skin burns, swollen eyes, and coughing up blood.²⁰ I'm not sure if the U.N. and OPCW have investigated these attacks on western Aleppo, but certainly they haven't received the level of attention and condemnation of the incidents blamed on government forces. In fact, later on August 2, an alleged government chlorine attack on Saraqeb, Idlib, eclipsed the rebel attack in Western media, while it killed no one.²¹

Late 2016 Aleppo Attacks: General Questions

After the August 2 rebel attack in Aleppo, as if in revenge or as a counter-point, reports emerged of government helicopters dropping chlorine canisters in rebel-held eastern Aleppo. These began at least by August 10, when a woman and her three children were said to be killed by the gas.²² Another claimed attack on September 6 reportedly killed a man and a girl, apparently in two locales. However, both victims seem to be shown on video, and neither displays any chlorine indicators.²³

There were lesser attacks reported in this span, but then a slight pause, during which a non-fatal helicopter drop in Hama province was alleged on October 25.²⁴ A few weeks later, a more concerted and noted string of allegations emerged in Aleppo, with reported chlorine tanks dropped in several areas, shortly ahead of the final government re-conquest of that area. The tanks were often shown, ruptured and arguably consistent with such a long fall, or maybe with some other long fall. By the end of December, all of east Aleppo was cleared of opposition forces, and at least eight new chlorine attacks were reported; falling between November 18 and December 9, these were noted in a February report by Human Rights Watch (HRW)²⁵ as well as in the Col's February 2 report.

These incidents add to the list of allegations, and to findings against the government of the Syrian Arab Republic. But as my analysis of the HRW report shows, they also lead to more

19 <http://presstv.com/Detail/2016/03/09/454661/Syria-chemical-attack-Aleppo-YPG/>

20 http://acloserlookonsyria.shoutwiki.com/wiki/Alleged_Chemical_Attack_August_2_2016

21 *ibid.*

22 http://acloserlookonsyria.shoutwiki.com/wiki/Alleged_Chemical_Attack_August_10_2016

23 <http://libyancivilwar.blogspot.com/2016/09/sept-6-fatalities-seen-on-video.html>

24 <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2016/11/02/osint-analysis-alleged-chemical-weapon-attack-al-lataminah/>

25 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/13/syria-coordinated-chemical-attacks-aleppo>

evidence-based question marks over government guilt, and still to no irrefutable proof of the inherently illogical claims.²⁶ Here are some key points I must raise:

- The alleged government strategy, as outlined by HRW, is not clearly logical; there would be a chlorine attack in an area, with no fighters targeted, often a few civilians killed, some kind of worry caused ... and a few days later, Syrian forces would take the area. It's completely unclear how the former helps with the latter. Furthermore, the interval between gas and conquest seems loose and varied, more like someone predicting government moves and usually guessing early.
- Even after these incidents, there's still no video of these chlorine bombs falling from a helicopter; in most of the eight cases HRW considered, people say they saw it happen in broad daylight, but no one filmed it. One effort splices a helicopter overhead, with nothing seen falling, onto a possibly different scene with a sound like an incoming rocket, and an apparent green smoke bomb used to mimic chlorine (it rises, while chlorine is heavier than air, and the color is wrong, a too vivid shade of green).²⁷
- However, apparently real chlorine is seen creeping along the ground in at least one other case.²⁸ It was faked in at least one case, but released to some degree anyway. In context, it's quite likely rebels released both the real and fake kinds themselves, as evidence for their accusations.

Late 2016 Aleppo Attacks: A Troubling Record on the Victims

- Of sixteen Human Rights Watch was told of, two men have full names (though one is listed by some as an unidentified woman), a family of six are identified by last name only, and eight others are completely unnamed. Of these, one is said to be a woman aged 55, and seven others, from the incidents of November 28 and December 9, have no gender or age clues provided (HRW considered those seven unverified).²⁹ Five members of the family are shown on two videos, but the other victims remain unseen as well as mostly unnamed. This is a rather anonymous batch. Their identities may be mostly-hidden for some good reason.
- Among those named is the family, given as Baytounji.³⁰ A fairly serious internet search with the proper Arabic spelling (بيتونجي) found exactly one other instance of this name anywhere in the world and in time (there must be more, but this is all I could find): in 1933, **an apparent Christian in Aleppo (Mr. Ibrahim Hajjar al-Baytounji) was asked for a “share” (donation) to build a**

26 <http://libyancivilwar.blogspot.com/2017/02/assessing-hrws-latest-chlorine-report.html>

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 See 15 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/13/syria-coordinated-chemical-attacks-aleppo>

30 Ibid.

new roof for St. George's church in the Assyrian district.³¹ This is a tentative finding, but so far the name appears only in connection to Christians in Aleppo, so it seems likely these are more of the same, a few generations on. They might have been taken hostage by Islamist forces. As defeat drew near, some armed groups would liquidate property, including the execution of hostages. The name is so rare it's likely rebels thought no one would notice its implication, and left this portion not quite anonymous. However, it's also quite possible this is a false name, or some kind of confusion. But it may well merit some looking into.

– As noted above, the Baytounji family might have been taken hostage by Islamist forces. In fact, there are some direct signs of that; the father and four children were apparently found fully clothed after the midnight attack, but still they couldn't get outside the house. That doesn't add up well. Hair sticking “up” and other clues suggest they may have been bound for some time in an upside-down position, although there are no obvious signs of bondage.³²

– Their clinical signs are yet to be connected to any poison known to me or my small network, but it's clearly not a normal exposure to chlorine. They may have cyanosis (purple lips), but don't seem to have red eyes or signs of much mucous. Their faces look almost baked, with dry skin pulled tight, yellow-orange to brown in color, and possibly with light mucous or tears in the eyes drying into a white, powdery-looking residue. It suggests exposure to extreme heat and perhaps smoke, besides perhaps some unknown chemical. What happened to this family is, at the moment, a terrible mystery.

– The dark rings around the victims' eyes might be a clearer sign, and not be poison-related at all. These all-around black rings are likely “raccoon eyes” (periorbital ecchymosis), which would almost certainly be caused by **a sharp blow to the back of the head** that cracked the skull. Happening in four of five seen cases here, that would have to be from a violent attack, coming many hours to a day or more prior to the alleged chlorine drop. It would likely knock them unconscious, and might have been done to make it easier to tie them all up prior to their mysterious killing.³³ This can't be done by a passing helicopter. It will be the local forces still, barely, on the ground at the time, who quite likely held the Baytounji family prisoner already.

Questionable Loss-of-Consciousness Claims

With this family, and in most other cases since 2014, there's an explicit or implicit claim that the

31 Essay (Arabic): <http://www.qenshrin.com/details.php?id=32742#.WKhrBx-rH-s> St. George's Church on Wikimapia, near but not in present Assyrian district:

<http://wikimapia.org/#lang=en&lat=36.213526&lon=37.154531&z=18&m=b&search=St.%20George>

32 <http://libyancivilwar.blogspot.com/2017/02/syria-chlorine-allegations-baytounji.html>

33 Ibid.

victims lose consciousness or become paralyzed by the gas almost immediately, so they never escape their gas-filled home until rescued, breathing in far too much to survive as they passively lay there. Usually, there's no sign they were knocked unconscious. That leaves little good reason for anyone to just sit there and die, considering the science of chlorine poisoning.

Depending on the severity of exposure, victims suffer lung and eye damage, have difficulty breathing, and cough violently, but remain awake. As oxygen levels in the blood drop, they will display cyanosis and will suffer some fatigue (notably in the legs, which *can* result in an optional sort of immobility). Nearly everyone will move out of the gas cloud on their own, but many will have suffered severe damage that keeps playing out over the following hours and days. After a time, some victims finally black out when the oxygen level in their brain falls too low, and death usually follows soon after that.

So in the first moments after the bomb crashes in and fills a house with gas, people should all remain conscious and would probably all move away as quickly as possible, by going outside.³⁴ Homes in Syria are not terribly large on average, and the exit is usually not many steps away. But in the reports from rebel territory in Syria, they hardly ever make it to the door. Every chance they're given, people there pass out instantly or become paralyzed and breathe in a fatal dose, or so it's said. This highly questionable claim plays into at least these alleged chlorine attacks:

– March 16, 2015, Sarmin: As noted above, the grandmother managed to climb a few steps before she stopped moving and then died, while the others were found, alive but immobile, inside their apartment (noting that the OPCW's investigators were told a different, slightly more plausible story). A rescuer who says he helped remove the victims added “one of our team members passed out due to the smell.”³⁵ After a trip to the hospital, the victims' stripped and washed bodies continued to emit such strong fumes, Dr. Tennari claimed, that his eyes burned, and (as the New York Times heard) a nurse “fainted from the chlorine fumes off the injured.”³⁶

– May 2, 2015, Neirab, Idlib: a passed-out man and baby remained inside their gas-filled home (both were said to be alive and only died later in hospital). A rescue worker stymied by a locked door says he saw them through a window and then “I felt like I was going to pass out. I started running and I lost consciousness. I didn't wake up until other civil defense workers washed me with water.”

34 <http://libyancivilwar.blogspot.com/2017/02/does-chlorine-make-you-pass-out.html>

35 <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/syria-got-rid-of-its-chemical-weapons-but-reports-of-attacks-continue/>

36 http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/17/world/middleeast/un-security-council-sees-video-evidence-of-a-chemical-attack-in-syria.html?_r=1

– August 10, 2016, Aleppo: Human Rights Watch reported “the children were unconscious and unresponsive. Their mother was shivering, coughing, and wheezing. She barely could breathe and was drooling heavily from her mouth. Their clothes were covered in a wet substance with a sharp smell, like chlorine.” All four died within a five minute span.³⁷ This is a strange case. The children sound quite like the Sarmin victims, so it's possible these children too were overdosed. The mother smelled like chlorine, but it came in a liquid form. This is a strange claim. Perhaps she fell down in a red-purple puddle of the chlorine precursors.

– September 6, Aleppo: “Some fainted and vomited, one doctor said.” Two died, details unclear.

– November 20, Aleppo: The Baytounji family of six just sat there and died. Neighbors found them later still inside, their faces appearing “blue.”

– November 23, Aleppo: a woman just sat in her home and died.

– Nov. 28, Aleppo: of several affected people, an activist said "most had lost consciousness and there was foam coming from their mouths." Two reportedly died.

– December 8, Aleppo: 2 men sat there and died in their home(s).

– December 9, perhaps 5 died, quite likely just laying in some home(s).

In this last and all cases where it's not specified, like all the 2014 attacks, it's quite likely this is the best story they could come up with. And so it seems the opposition's basic explanation for the high death is this unusual domestic paralysis. But it's extremely unlikely that the scientific norms would be defied so consistently in any real-world sequence of events. This too merits professional investigation. If warranted, the record should be corrected to reflect *the lack of credible information about these events*, and the need to finally get some.

Conclusion: Too Much Remains Unknown

Much remains unknown to everyone external to these events inside rebel-held areas. In a previous U.N. report from 2016, for example, some of the explanations offered by the Syrian government sound to me more like theories or *possible* explanations, that seem unproven, unlikely, or irrelevant to the core issues. For example, in the crucial Sarmin case, they're said to claim a cooking gas accident damaged the Taleb family's apartment,³⁸ and separately, an accidental

³⁷ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/09/28/syria-new-deadly-chemical-attacks>

³⁸ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/738 Annex VII, point 59, page 82

chlorine spill caused the mass poisoning.³⁹ That includes no explanation for the magenta fluid shown in the damaged home, nor the family of six said to die there. Of course, Damascus probably *shouldn't* have an equivocal explanation for a murky event inside rebel territory right away, if ever. If these were offered as factually explanations, that's a problem. If they were just misrepresented as that in the report, that's a different kind of problem.

The pro-opposition powers likely have no more actual, direct insight into what happens in these cases. But they're provided with conveniently packaged stories from their sponsored activists, always blaming the shared enemies in Damascus, Moscow, or maybe Tehran. The CoI's February 2 report refers to these dubious dispatches in a troubling manner:

52. The Commission investigated numerous incidents of **allegations** of improvised chlorine bombs dropped from helicopters, which resulted in civilian casualties. In none of the incidents reviewed did information gathered suggest the involvement of Russian forces. *Given that the incidents reported were all the result of air-delivered bombs, it is concluded that these attacks were carried out by Syrian air forces.* The use of chlorine by Syrian forces follows a pattern observed in 2014 and 2015 (see S/2016/738).

With my added emphasis, we can see the central error: “given” that the helicopter “allegation” **is true**, and they don't blame Russia, they conclude that the Syrian government must be to blame. *But they never explain why they think the accusation is true.* The previous “observations” they mention are of the same kind: it was said the killer gas came from a helicopter, and that was accepted with no proof required. With this easy “finding” following on the others, it should be easier yet to pin the blame for another year's worth of alleged drops in some 2018 report.

The 7 March draft resolution says the the U.N. Human Rights Council, ideally:

*“Welcomes the reports of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) - United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism of 24 August and 21 October 2016, and expresses grave concern with its findings that the Syrian Arab Armed Forces were responsible for the use of chemical weapons (chlorine) in three attacks in the Syrian Arab Republic (Talmenes in 2014 and Qmenas and Sarmin in 2015)”*⁴⁰ (emphasis in original)

These are indeed the findings, and they do seem to be fully expected and warmly welcomed by a

³⁹ Ibid, point 17, p.79

⁴⁰ March 7 draft, point 24

lot of people who don't have to live in Syria, or defend it against a foreign-sponsored terrorist insurgency. But these findings are based on the same kind of baseless givens and circular reasoning.

I've explained how the Sarmin attack involved children killed locally by non-chlorine methods. This is a visually proven claim; unless the symptoms changed or the camera started lying, the foreign-supported opposition is proven again to be lying (or some may just be duped). A family was murdered, the crime has never been credibly linked to the Syrian government, and in fact the verbal linkage is provably incorrect and suggests **a cover-up of the true crime**. Yet that apparent cover story stands as the only reasons needed to keep official pressure on Syria's government to eventually be "held accountable" for it, and to serve as another precedent to ease the process of deciding the same thing, again and again.

It's hard to avoid the conclusion this is a geopolitical campaign against Syria and its allies, with moral pretexts, true or false, grabbed at every chance. It's best to be open about the root cause of such problems, but given the immense controlling powers of those pushing the allegations, that can be awkward. I understand this information is to be shared largely with diplomats, so here's another test of your skills.

All decent people should stand by truth in the face of power when that's the choice. Honest minds should refuse to accept anyone's claims without good reason, and pursue a genuine, neutral, science-based investigation. This is just what the OPCW and U.N. promised to deliver, but so far have not. This fact needs to be pointed out publicly, and pointedly, before there's much hope of securing an objective try at the truth.

- Sincerely,

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A Closer Look On Syria, Monitor on Massacre Marketing

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Postscript (moved side-points of some importance)

These type of hostage clues, alternate poisons, etc., as mentioned in this report - besides credible claims of rebel CW use - constitute "red flags," suggesting opposition forces may be behind all such incidents. I set to tallying these, resulting in a table of 138 alleged chemical attacks (with chlorine, sarin, and others, from November, 2012 to February, 2017) blamed on the government and

the foreign-sponsored opposition (everyone but Islamic State). With 159 red flags identified between them, there are more problems with the reflexive government blame than there are incidents.⁴¹

It bears mentioning that these red flags have appeared before those mentioned in this report, including the earlier phase of alleged sarin attacks in 2012-2013, which are now widely discredited, if still officially accepted. Opposition forces have always had the capability and far clearer motive to launch CW attacks and have the Syrian government blamed for crossing U.S. President Obama's "red line," and perhaps earning them military support against that government. And the evidence – independently analyzed – often supports that possibility.

The first two listed incidents, with unspecified chemicals dropped by government jets in late 2012, reportedly killed one child each: a boy on November 17, and a girl on the 23rd. In both cases, the child was from a family listed as displaced from the Damascus suburb of Douma, having fled there to other towns nearby, where they died. Douma was the home-base for the growing force of Jaish al-Islam (Jal), which reportedly received ample support from the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, despite its leader's public threats to "cleanse" Syria of Shi'ites, Alawites, and ethnic Persians.⁴² In late 2012, Jal was expanding its area of dominance, and perhaps catching up with some who had tried to escape their rule. The boy victim is shown in a photo, with no chemical indicators, but neck bruises suggesting he was **manually strangled to death**.⁴³

In the same area, nine months later, the infamous Ghouta incident of August 21, 2013 is another such case. With over 1,000 allegedly killed by sarin rockets near the capitol, this archetypal Syrian CW attack came exactly one year after President Obama's threat, and about a day after U.N.-OPCW investigators arrived in Damascus to probe earlier CW allegations. Little-known but compelling evidence suggests the victims were not random residents of this depopulated area, but actually **civilians held prisoner** by the opposition forces (we see gender imbalance, some starvation and abuse signs, uniform haircuts, women dying in their winter coats and luggage seemingly packed and brought by those who died, many of whom were whole families of "displaced" people, plus several cases of thinly concealed execution of the victims, etc.).⁴⁴

The number of dead (probably over 500, if not the claimed 1,429) is huge, and fairly illogical, unless mass extermination in gas chambers was involved. An in-depth analysis of imagery of hundreds of victims, conducted by research affiliate Denis O'Brien, PhD, shows indicators of a

41 http://ciwclibya.org/images/Red_Flags_Across_the_Red_Line_final_3-3-17.pdf

42 <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/zahran-alloush/>

43 <http://libyancivilwar.blogspot.com/2017/02/what-happened-little-ways-from-douma-in.html>

44 <http://libyancivilwar.blogspot.com/2015/05/syria-ghouta-massacres-visual-evidence.html>

sarin attack (especially the SLUDGE syndrome) are not present. Most likely, sarin was not responsible. Further, O'Brien studied victims in the Kafr Batna district which strongly suggests at least 85 apparently captive civilians, including dozens of women and children, were deliberately **gassed in a basement** of what we have identified as the old tuberculosis (al-Sel) hospital. The killers apparently used carbon monoxide, hydrogen cyanide, or something else that's rubigenic (leaves the victim redder than usual). **One apparent survivor was finished off in the rebel morgue upstairs, with a very bloody injury to the throat.** ⁴⁵

That video-illustrated portion of the Ghouta massacre(s), at least, was quite clearly the work of the occupying terrorists, who in that area were dominated by Jaish al-Islam. It had nothing to do with sarin, nor with those mystery rockets fired by whomever, from any kilometers' distance. But to the extent these matter:

- No fatalities were tested for sarin; alleged survivors were tested instead. They seem to have had very low doses, and may well have volunteered for low-level, controlled exposure to fake the tests. ⁴⁶ Also, sarin may have really been released. If so, it might be central, or not. This was never clearly established, but taken on faith instead.
- The sarin sampled was apparently improvised, and not from government stocks. ⁴⁷
- The rockets' original ownership is unclear, but either side could have them.
- The 12 rocket impacts identified in Zamalka were fired from a no-man's land accessible to either side, ⁴⁸ and not possibly from the government missile base originally claimed by the U.S. government. ⁴⁹
- People dressed as Jaish al-Islam fighters filmed themselves firing just this model of rockets somewhere in the area on the same night, and published the video by 4 am (JaI claims they were framed).

45 <http://logosphere.com/Ghouta%20Massacre/Contents.htm> and for the executed survivor, see also <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IR05Bpyo7wg>

46 <http://libyancivilwar.blogspot.com/2014/11/the-ghouta-massacres-sarin-myth.html>

47 <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v35/n24/seymour-m-hersh/whose-sarin>

48 <http://whoghouta.blogspot.com/2013/09/mapping-source-of-attack.html>

49 <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article24761710.html>