

# Media Ignores Explosive Revelations About Chemical Weapons in Syria

By [Yves Engler](#)

Global Research, December 23, 2019

[Yves Engler](#) 22 December 2019

Region: [Canada](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

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*The Canadian media gets a failing grade when it comes to its coverage of chemical weapons in Syria.*

*Among the basic principles of reporting, as taught in every journalism school, are: Constantly strive for the truth; Give voice to all sides of a story; When new information comes to light about a story you reported, a correction must be issued or a follow-up produced.*

But the Canadian media has ignored explosives revelations from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. It's a stark example of their complicity with belligerent Canadian foreign policy in Syria.

In May 2019 a member of the OPCW Fact Finding Mission in Syria, Ian Henderson, released a document claiming the management of the organization misled the public about the purported chemical attack in Douma in April 2018. It showed that the organization [suppressed](#) an assessment that contradicted the claim that a gas cylinder fell from the air. In November another [OPCW whistleblower](#) added to the Henderson revelations, saying that his conclusion that the incident was "[a non chemical](#)-related event" was twisted to imply the opposite. Last week WikiLeaks released a [series of internal](#) documents demonstrating that the team who wrote the OPCW's report on Douma didn't go to Syria. One memo noted that 20 OPCW inspectors felt the report released "[did not](#) reflect the views of the team members that deployed to [Syria]."

I couldn't find a single report about the whistleblowers/leaks in any major Canadian media outlet. They also ignored explicit suppression of the leaks.

Journalist Tareq Haddad "[resigned](#) from *Newsweek* after my attempts to publish newsworthy revelations about the leaked OPCW letter were refused for no valid reason." Haddad wrote a [long article](#) explaining his resignation, which detailed how an editor who previously worked at the European Council on Foreign Relations blocked it.

There is an important Canadian angle to this story. Twenty-four hours after the alleged April 7, 2018, chemical attack foreign affairs minister Chrystia Freeland put out a statement claiming, "[it is](#) clear to Canada that chemical weapons were used and that they were used by the Assad regime." Five days later Prime Minister Justin Trudeau supported cruise missile strikes on a Syrian military base stating, "[Canada supports](#) the decision by the United States, the United Kingdom, and France to take action to degrade the Assad regime's ability to launch chemical weapons attacks against its own people."

Canadian officials have pushed for the organization to blame Bashar al-Assad's government for chemical attacks since Syria [joined the OPCW](#) and had its declared chemical weapon stockpile destroyed in 2013-14. Canada's special envoy to the OPCW, Sabine Nolke, has repeatedly [accused](#) Assad's forces of employing chemical weapons. Instead of expressing concern over political manipulation of evidence, Nolke criticized the leak. In a statement after Henderson's position was made public she noted, "[Canada](#) remains steadfast in its confidence in the professionalism and integrity of the FFM [Fact-Finding Mission] and its methods. However, Mr. Chair, we are unsettled with the leak of official confidential documents from the Technical Secretariat."

Amidst efforts to blame the Syrian government for chemical weapons use, Canadian officials lauded the OPCW and plowed tens of millions of dollars into the organization. A June 2017 Global Affairs release boasted that "[Canada](#) and the United States are the largest national contributors to the JIM [OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism for Attributing Responsibility for Chemical Weapons Attacks in Syria]."

The statement added that Canada "is the largest voluntary cash contributor to the organization, having provided nearly \$25 million since 2012 to help destroy chemical weapons in Libya and Syria and to support special missions and contingency operations related to chemical weapons use, investigation, verification and monitoring in Syria." Two months after the Douma incident Freeland announced a [\\$7.5 million](#) contribution to the OPCW in a statement heavily focused on Syria. In August Governor General Julie Payette even traveled to The Hague to push OPCW Director-General, Fernando Arias, on Syria. After a "[meeting focused](#) on OPCW activities in Syria", Payette highlighted Canada's "\$23 million in voluntary funds for Syria-related activities."

Ottawa backed the group that produced the (probably staged) video purporting to show chemical weapons use in Douma. The Liberals backed the White Helmets diplomatically and financially. In a release about the purported attack in Douma Freeland expressed Canada's "[admiration](#) for ... the White Helmets", later calling them "[heroes](#)." Representatives of the White Helmet repeatedly came to Ottawa to meet government officials and Canadian officials helped members of the group escape Syria via Israel in July 2018. Alongside tens of millions of dollars from the US, [British](#), [Dutch](#), German and French governments, Global Affairs announced "[\\$12](#) million for groups in Syria, such as the White Helmets, that are saving lives by providing communities with emergency response services and removing explosives."

Credited with rescuing people from bombed out buildings, the White Helmets fostered opposition to Assad and promoted western intervention. [Founded](#) by former British army officer James Le Mesurier, the White Helmets [operated](#) almost entirely in areas of Syria occupied by the Saudi Arabia-Washington backed Al Nusra/Al Qaeda insurgents and other rebels. They criticized the Syrian government and disseminated images of its purported violence while largely ignoring civilians targeted by the opposition. Their members were repeatedly photographed with Al Qaeda-linked Jihadists and [reportedly](#) enabled their executions.

The White Helmets helped establish an early warning system for airstrikes that benefited opposition insurgents. Framed as a way to save civilians, the 'Sentry' system tracked and validated information about potential airstrikes.

Canada funded the Hala Systems' air warning, which was set up by former Syria focused [US diplomat](#) John Jaeger. It's unclear how much Canadian money was put into the initiative but

in September 2018 Global Affairs boasted that “[Canada](#) is the largest contributor to the ‘Sentry’ project.”

Ottawa is dedicated to a particular depiction of the Syrian war and clearly so is the dominant media. Committed to a highly simplistic account of a messy and multilayered conflict, they’ve suppressed evidence suggesting that an important international organization has doctored evidence to align with a narrative used to justify military strikes.

Journalists are supposed to seek the truth, not simply what their government says. In fact, according to what is taught in J-school, journalists have a special responsibility to question what their government claims to be true.

No journalism program in Canada teaches that governments should always be believed, especially on military and foreign affairs. But that is how the dominant media has acted in the case of Syrian chemical weapons.

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