

# Is Trump Making Up Syria-Sarin Claims?

The White House claimed victory after it warned Syria not to mount a chemical weapons attack and nothing happened, but some experts are questioning the quality of these U.S. claims about Syria and sarin, says Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

This week, the White House issued a warning to Syria that it would pay a “heavy price” if it carried out a chemical weapons attack that was allegedly in the works – and President Trump took credit when no attack occurred. But no evidence was presented to support the White House claims amid growing doubts about Trump’s earlier missile attack on Syria in retaliation for another alleged chemical attack on April 4.

The latest doubts about the April 4 incident came from legendary investigative reporter Seymour Hersh – published in the Sunday edition of *Die Welt* – who questioned whether the Syrian government carried it out. Hersh earlier had disputed U.S. government claims that the Syrian government was responsible for a sarin attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013.

Another skeptic of these U.S. government accusations is Theodore Postol, professor emeritus of science, technology, and national security policy at MIT. In earlier comments on the topic of allegations of Syria’s use of chemical weapons, Postol stated, “The White House took unjustified actions – and is now creating another set of reasons for more such actions. Chances of an unpredictable escalation are significant. Trump is pushing the Russians to extreme positions and he’s undermining the effort to destroy the Islamic State.”

I spoke to Postol on Pacifica Radio’s Flashpoints show about the U.S. claims that Syria had used chemical weapons as well as the dangers of a new global conflagration if the U.S. launches another attack on Syrian government forces now closely aligned with nuclear-armed Russia.

Dennis Bernstein: So, now, why don’t you come at this, because we’ve seen a bit of evidence that these first two attacks by the Syrian government with chemicals really weren’t from the Syrian government, if in fact they occurred at all. Clearly, the information isn’t clear. You want to jump in here?

Theodore Postol: Well, I think there’s a real dangerous situation in the United States actually, where people seem to really hate the Syrian government and that’s not hard to do. The brutality of the behavior of the Syrian government there, there’s nothing to talk about, except to agree that it’s a very brutal regime. But, the problem is that they’re also fighting very brutal rebels, and

nobody comes out looking especially good.

So, the real question is whether or not the Syrian government had been, in fact, responsible for the nerve agent attacks. And, I think the answer is "No." I mean there's no evidence to prove that. In fact, the evidence overwhelmingly points to the likelihood that these were attacks by rebel elements [...] with a very serious and clear military goal. The goal was to make it look like there's a nerve agent attack perpetrated by the Syrian government, thereby causing the United States to come in and attack Syrian military assets, which would then make it easier for the rebels to defeat the Syrian government. So, it's kind of a bizarre situation.

Nobody looks good here. I want to be very clear, I'm not trying to in any way suggest that the Syrian government is a group of good guys. But it's important, I think, for us to keep our eye on the ball. And the eye on the ball requires that we aim at defeating ISIS, which is the gravest threat, for all of us. And then if there are opportunities to do something about the Syrian government, I'm certainly not opposed to it. But as of right now, this preoccupation with taking down Assad is really very counterproductive toward the overriding important goal, which is to defeat ISIS.

DB: Now, Seymour Hersh – who's now publishing in Germany, one of the best reporters the United States ever produced, investigative reporters, is reporting in other countries because it's very difficult to get his information in this country – has again written a very compelling piece that seriously calls into question the last [chemical] attack, so-called from the Syrian government. You have taken great pains to demonstrate that perhaps there are grave doubts about who did this bombing, if there was a chemical bombing, and where it came from. Could you just give us your best shot at why you doubt the last one came from the Syrian government?

TP: Well, there's a great deal of forensic evidence in the form of videos that have been posted on the web. And some of the video data was actually cited by the White House in their April 11 – I don't know if you'd call it – intelligence report. What happened is, the president ordered this attack on the Shayrat Air Base in Syria. That was on April 7. The attack that allegedly was a nerve agent attack by the Syrian government occurred on April 4. And on April 11 the National Security Council put out this White House intelligence report.

And I have a fair amount of experience reading these kinds of things. And it was very clear to me that they were citing evidence that no competent intelligence agent would cite. And that evidence was images of a crater taken, through videos, which I got a hold of from the web. And this crater had a pipe in it, and the pipe was kind of bent. And this was supposedly the source of this sarin

attack.

Well, first of all, the pipe could not have contained much sarin. And if you're going to have a significant number of people injured downwind, you need a significant amount of sarin. So that was a problem right there. And then the second thing was that the crater looked like it was kind of possibly made from a rocket, but from a very small explosion. And, if anything, it looked like... if you believed anything, you would believe that this was an improvised device that was set on the ground, and detonated on the ground, not delivered by air.

But the real fundamental problem was nobody – nobody who has any knowledge at all of forensic evidence analysis – would have assumed that this material had not been tampered with, had not been put in place.

And so, for the U.S. government to be citing evidence that no competent intelligence analyst would first, if they believed the evidence, find compelling. And second, if they believed the evidence it would indicate that they were really not an experienced analyst, would cite this evidence. So, it was really very suspicious.

And my conclusion was, and remains, that this report was put together by a bunch of amateurs on the National Security Council probably designed to cover the fact that the president impulsively attacked Syria without adequate intelligence. That was my guess then. And that's what Sy Hersh reports. And, quite frankly, none of what he reports is not totally consistent with everything else that I have found, using totally different methods. So I would say the Hersh report looks like it's... if there are errors in it, they are only of the most minor nature. I think that the report is accurate.

DB: And so, now, here we go again. We've got Trump saying, even his own amateurs who put together, as you call them, the last report, are saying that nobody has heard about this information, this evidence. Have you? Do you have any information, is something new that we all don't know about? What do you think is at play here?

TP: It's difficult to know. But my guess – and it is a guess– it seems to me that the president has made a pretty significant error by attacking a country, and actually jeopardizing our relationship with Russia, because we need to defeat ISIS. We need cooperation from the Russians on this. He's not a man who seems to be able to acknowledge he's made errors. And it may just be something that has gotten in his head. I just don't know. But it's very dangerous, it's extremely dangerous. Because the Russians have already had an important ally of theirs [Syria] attacked for no reason. And there's only so much they're going to put up

with. And I'm afraid that they will lose patience and do something that will then cause an action/reaction cycle.

DB: You know a lot about the technology that's at play now in terms of all sides at war in this little country. What are your fears, in terms of the technology, the way stuff is flying around, what's going on, what are you thinking?

TP: Well, I think the most dangerous aspect of the president's new posture, and this is very dangerous, this is what has got me tremendously worried, even more than I was, was his position that, essentially, that any evidence of a chemical attack, it's not even clear he's limiting it to a nerve agent, that any evidence of a chemical attack, he will ascribe to the Syrians and Russians.

In other words, he will not take steps to determine whether or not the attacks are false flag attacks. And so, whether intended or not, he's encouraging the rebels to engage in false flag attacks, in the hope that this will escalate American response, an unjustified American response, against Syria and Russia.

And that's what they [the rebels] really need at this time because they are losing the war very badly. So they're in an endgame in Idlib, where Khan Sheikhoun is, where this nerve agent, this alleged nerve agent attack, occurred. And these people are very desperate.

And let me underscore, it may be that Assad is a butcher, but he's not alone. In this war, it doesn't matter. These are people who argue about whether you cut off someone's head from left to right, or right to left. That's where the disagreements are. These are not people who are just innocent victims of some kind of monstrous brutality on the part of the Assad government. They are equally brutal. And we need to focus on winning this war against ISIS, and then doing what we can to stop these horrifying atrocities on both sides.

But right now I don't think the Syrian government is in any way responsible for this nerve agent attack. I think it's a totally orchestrated process. And I think the evidence is overwhelming, it's overwhelming.

DB: Wow. And finally what is your worst fear? How could this unravel?

TP: Well, it could unravel badly, if there's a significant chemical attack by the rebels and nobody is able to get the president to think about the consequences of blaming the Syrians and Russians, without evidence. That's the problem. If there's no evidence that the Syrians and Russians were in any way involved in this [...] and there's no incentive for them, I should point out.

If you're winning the war, why would you attack people that are far behind the lines with nerve agent? It's just ridiculous. You know, if you're going to use

the nerve agent... if you're desperate, and you're going to use the nerve agent, you're gonna use it up in the combat areas. And you already know that the United States will bring the full force of its military power on you, if they determine that you, in fact, engaged in this attack, and you're winning the war. So why would you risk this tremendous setback that would occur if the United States came after you? So, it makes no sense from the point of view of motives, and also, there's no forensic evidence to support that there was a nerve agent attack.

Everything you look at, which is used to claim that there's evidence, turns out to be false. The New York Times published a video online, and I wrote a paper about it, that's now widely circulating, that showed that every piece, without exclusion, every piece of forensic evidence they showed, derived from videos, proved the opposite of what they were claiming. Every piece, there was not an exception.

And if this is the way the mainstream news media is going to handle this matter, then where are the American people going to get a more thought-out and informed ... view of this information? And this is a hand in hand recklessness, not only... I mean if people want to point at Mr. Trump, fine, but they ought to look at their own newspapers, because they are not doing their job.

There's a very interesting article in the New York Times on page A11 today [June 29 of print version; June 28 online]. And for the first time the New York Times is talking about an "alleged" nerve agent attack. That's a complete change in their rhetoric. And I'm hoping that this is an indication that somebody at the Times finally got the message. But this article now, is now talking about an alleged chemical agent attack, which is absolutely different, an absolute 180 degree turnaround from what they were saying, even a day before. So, we'll see. I'm hoping that this is actually an indication that the New York Times has finally figured out there's something wrong. I've been in contact. They have the information I've provided to them. But they don't seem to want to respond.

DB: Hmmm, the "paper of record." Alright, well, we're going to watch this obviously very closely. We're all sitting on the edge of our chairs, and we're all biting our fingernails off because this really is, I guess you would agree, one of the most dangerous times in modern history, in our lives.

TP: This is almost like a Cuban Missile Crisis, without the public's attention. You know, we're getting into that kind of territory now. Except nobody seems to be aware, in the general public, how serious this matter is.

**Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the**

audio archives at [www.flashpoints.net](http://www.flashpoints.net).

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