On Listening to Seymour Hersh Ramble about His "Inside Knowledge about Syria"

written by Stanley Heller | July 9, 2017



Journalist Seymour Hersh was interviewed by Aaron Maté of the Real News Network on June 26 after he wrote an article called "Trump's Red Line."

Hersh tells Maté that the U.S. runs an elaborate system to keep Russian and U.S. planes out of each other's way as they bomb Syria. Supposedly the Russians told the U.S. about the April 4 attack in advance, that the Syrians were going to bomb a "command and control" center with a laser controlled bomb and that if the U.S. had any spy in the building they should tell to "get him out gracefully." It was done early in the morning, he says because command and control centers "have lots of people around, shops…"

Hersh says the Russians had identified this center in Idlib and it had lots of supplies inside and that's how al-Nusra could maintain control of the population. He says there was lots of stuff there including disinfectant that's chlorine-based and also cooking oil which is in plastic containers and maybe the pre-cursors of sarin or "local sarin." When all this was hit by a bomb it could have created the toxic cloud that killed people, he says.

Then Hersh says he doesn't know what happened, just what didn't happen. "Syria did not drop a sarin bomb," he declares.

He says we don't know what happened because "no independent unit, no UN unit has been allowed in the area, it's too dangerous" because "you'd lose your head…literally." (A bit of Islamaphobia here? Kareem Shaheen, reporter for the British paper the *Guardian*, was in the city within a day.)

No independent investigation? The UN's partner, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) issued a finding on April 19 that there was "Incontrovertible Laboratory Results" and that sarin was used on April 4. It wrote that its work was based "interviews, evidence management and sample acquisition." That sounds like an independent investigation to me. Hersh never mentions it.

*Maté never asks Hersh how he knows all the things he's claiming***.** For that you have to look at Hersh's article "Trump's Red Line" that had been published in a German newspaper, *Welt*. Reading through it you realize the entire article is based on one anonymous source, "a senior adviser to the American intelligence community."

Hersh (who has won two Pulitizer Prizes) used to write for the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker* and most recently had several pieces on Syria in the *London Review of Books*. Even that magazine

turned him down on this article and you can see why. *One anonymous source? Give me a break.*

Now, consider what Hersh is arguing. He says Nusra had this command and control center in the middle of a crowded area with lots of shops and the center was filled with all kinds of stuff and the Assad air force blew it up and the resulting toxic cloud killed 80 people. Huh? Nusra put all it had together in a combination from the Pentagon and Walmart and that's where it held meetings? It sounds like utter crap.

Hersh says the Russians had a drone circulating around the "command and control" center for days observing who was coming and going. *So where are the photos of the building?* Where are the before and after photos from the Russian or Assad drone? None has ever been produced. When right after the April attack *Guardian* reporter Kareem Shaheen did go to the depot the Russians had said was bombed, he found the building still standing and only rubble, wheat and fertilizer inside.

For more about the deficiencies of Hersh's article see Elliot Higgins on his blog Bellingcat.

Postscript. At 02:50 in the interview Hersh talks about Idlib province: "This is the last outpost, the last sort of holding place, outside of Raqqa, for the rebel oppo…the crazies, the jihadists, the salfists, al Nusra is very big there, ISIS is big in Raqqa. Bashar is going to hold on, he's going to hold the country together, he's going to start a rebuilding program, whether we like him or don't like him …"

Is there any doubt where Hersh's sympathies lie? All the opposition to Assad is "the crazies." Hersh has the same hangdog "realism" of Stephen Cohen, touting Assad as the lesast of all the evils.

Can't wait for Hersh's next article, probably appearing first in the "The Duran" or the "Mint Press."

Postscript, June 30: By sheer coincidence the same day this piece was written the OPCW issued a statment confirming their earlier finding that sarin was used in Khan Shaykhun. They explain for reasons of security their team did not actually get into the city, but they tell how they investigated. "The rapid deployment to a neighbouring country, however, enabled the team to attend autopsies, collect bio-medical samples from casualties and fatalities, interview witnesses and receive environmental samples. A rigorous methodology was employed for conducting an investigation of alleged use of chemical weapons that took into account corroboration between interviewee testimonies; open-source research, documents, and other records; and the characteristics of the samples including those provided by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic."

Will the "anti-imperialists" now reject Hersh's fantastical explanation? They can always go back to the theory that the people in the city gassed their own children and relatives to gain sympathy. After all, everyone knows Trump is so friendly to Muslims that he'd rush to bomb Assad once he saw the pictures of the writhing victims…

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