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Seymour Hersh: US Security State Deceived Us on Syria Chemical Weapons

By Jonathan Cook

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Seymour Hersh publishes his latest, illuminating essay on the machinations of the US security state, this time in regard to Syria. Hersh makes a very convincing case that the US had no credible intelligence that August's chemical weapons attack in Ghouta using sarin was carried out by Assad's troops but that it did know that jihadi groups there, especially the al-Nusra Front, almost certainly had sarin and could use it.

While reading this piece, I kept thinking one thing: If Barack Obama had not been forced to scrap his plan to bomb Syria at the last minute, we would now be reading about these deceptions after thousands, or more likely tens of thousands, of Syrian civilians had been killed in allied bombing runs.

We might also be reading Hersh (or more likely not reading him, given the likely war hysteria) after US forces had got sucked into a ground invasion as the Assad regime collapsed. Hersh's piece suggests that the US military had a plan to invade if there was any danger that Assad's chemical weapons stockpile was in danger of being taken over by the rebels, as would have been inevitable had the regime fallen.

All of this sounds very familiar indeed. It was a rerun of Iraq and the bogus intelligence about its supposed WMD.

There are two important conclusions to be drawn from this story, in addition to the obvious one: that our governments keep lying to us to further their (not our) geopolitical interests and they invariably do so under the pretence of “humanitarianism”.

The first is that, not only do our governments lie as a matter of course, but our media lie entirely in sync with our governments. Hersh exposes a catalogue of journalistic failures in his piece, just as occurred in Iraq. He even points out that at one vital White House press conference, where the main, false narrative was set out, officials refused to invite a critical national security correspondent, presumably fearing that he might expose the charade.

Note that this piece by Hersh was rejected by the New Yorker, his usual home, and by the Washington Post, which may not be surprising given that the latter emerges from this article looking like a major offender in this journalistic farce.

Instead Hersh was forced to turn to the London Review of Books, a London literary publication that has on occasion served as a sanctuary for important articles spurned by the mainstream media. (The same happened with Walt and Mearsheimer’s infamous long essay on the Israel lobby, which later became a best-selling book called *The Lobby*.)

The other is that we as citizens (ruled over by our governments) and as readers (of their media) have to start waking up to these serial deceptions. Too many otherwise clever people fall time and again for the false narratives we are spun. There is a simple lesson: stop swallowing the so-called intelligence you are being told to justify aggression, most especially when it clashes with the precepts of common sense. This should be our position on Iran too.

Similarly, not only must we become less gullible but we must inoculate ourselves against those who are more susceptible to the virus. Those of us who tried to warn that we must be wary of official efforts to manipulate the intelligence and our understanding of events were denounced, as always happens in these circumstances, as Assad apologists.

Finally, it should be noted that Hersh’s role in exposing these deceptions, as in so many previous ones, should not lull us into a false complacency. His work does not demonstrate that our media is free and pluralistic. It shows something very different.

There will always be the odd investigative reporter like Hersh at the margins of the mainstream media. And one can understand why by reading Hersh closely. His sources of information are those in the security complex who lost the argument, or came close to losing the argument, and want it on record that they opposed the government line. Hersh is useful to them because he allows them to settle scores within the establishment or to act as a warning bell against future efforts to manipulate intelligence in the same manner. He is useful to us as readers because he reveals disputes that show us much more clearly what has taken place.

Unfortunately, Hersh’s role has been mainly one for the historians. He tells them after the event what really took place inside the corridors of power. But he could be so much important if we listened to him properly. For he keeps repeating the same truth: Beware our leaders.