



At UN, ex-Colin Powell aide calls out 'egregious' OPCW Syria cover-up

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OPENING SCREEN:

Lawrence Wilkerson is a retired Army Colonel who served as Chief of Staff to Secretary State Colin Powell. In 2003, Wilkerson helped prepare Powell's infamous speech to the United Nations making the phony case for invading Iraq. Wilkerson has since renounced those Iraq war fabrications. On April 16, 2021, Wilkerson returned to the UN Security Council to address another pro-war deception: the OPCW's Syria cover-up scandal.

LAWRENCE WILKERSON (LW): Well, thank you and thank you to all of you for allowing me to appear before this Arria-Formula Meeting. My bona fides is, if you will, in this matter, are general and that's the perspective from which I'd like to speak. I served for four years as the assistant to the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, roughly from 1989 to 1993. And then again, I served as his Chief of Staff and associate director of his policy planning staff when he was Secretary of State, roughly 2000 and 2005. So that's the experience level I have, if you will, in the highest corridors of power in Washington, in the United States government.

With that as a backdrop, let me say also that I know that the state capitals in the world, particularly Moscow, Beijing, Washington, Delhi and others, use their influence whenever they can and whenever they feel it necessary to pressure international organizations. And I know that leading the pack in that regard is my country. I was there when we went around the world, for example, negotiating bilateral Article 98 agreements with every country we could get into in order to subvert the ICC and to make sure that no US troops operating in anyone's country could ever be prosecuted by the ICC.

I was there when we brought undue pressure on the UN inspectors going into Iraq, not just once, but two or three times. I was there when Colin Powell gave that presentation at the United Nations. Indeed, I helped him to give it. I was there when we brought undue pressure on other international organizations to more or less influence them to make decisions that were in line with our policy preferences and in line with our security preferences.

Every state capital in the world of consequence at one time or another has probably done that. I know Beijing, Moscow, Washington do it all the time. So that's the perspective I'm coming

from. And here's the second part of my perspective. This OPCW business really needs to get settled. We're never going to have a perfect set of international organizations because of what I just described. But we can do better. And when we make mistakes, tragic mistakes, which I think this is a case of, we need to try and correct them. And I applaud you for having this meeting and other things that are going on, peripheral to it and ancillary to it, that are trying to do this. And all the people who are participating and trying to do it, because here we have an egregious situation that, from everything I can see, really calls on people of concern to straighten it out. And I like what Hans just said about doing that, an independent commission and so forth.

At the same time, I realize, too, that it's difficult to do this sort of thing and to in a sense, in a phrase, get away with it, because the capitals I just enumerated and others will be trying to keep you from doing it. There's no question in my mind that Bashar al-Assad has done some evil things. There's no question in my mind that Saddam Hussein did a lot of evil things. There's no question in my mind that Washington has done a lot of evil things and Moscow and Beijing, too. But here is a specific incident where we are undermining one of those organizations designed by all of us, I hope, to keep that from getting out of hand, to keep things on an even keel, if you will. To make sure people are, in fact, held responsible for deeds that they do, whether they are purported as such in the media or not. The real facts.

I've not been on the ground in Duma, but I've seen just hoards of photographs about the situation in Syria and about alleged chemical weapons use. And frankly, as a military professional, on each occasion, I was appalled. I was appalled at the media and the way they reported it. I was appalled at the sensation created around it and so forth. I knew that the United States Army, my army, had spent time in the Mediterranean destroying, I think it was six hundred metric tons of chemical weapons from Syria that Bashar al-Assad put some aside, possibly. But I know from my own authorities that they felt that was in conjunction with the Russians, that that was a pretty thorough cleansing of chemical weapons in Syria. So my antennas were up - up acutely, right away, when someone claims that there were chemical weapons used in Syria and that it was the government of Syria that did it.

And then when I saw the photographs and other things, I know a little bit about VX and sarin and chlorine and so forth. I saw that some of the claims were preposterous. They were preposterous, simply preposterous. When you see a man standing beside a crater, for example, and alleged VX or sarin was used, you know, it's preposterous. The man would be dead. I know how effective these kinds of chemical weapons are. And I happen to know also what kinds of weapons Syria had in its stockpile. We had a dossier on that for a long, long time during the Cold War. So count me very skeptical on even any use of chemical weapons of consequence by the Syrian government in Syria. That's the start point.

And then this occasion in April just seems to me to be a reflection of that plus an attempt to subvert an otherwise pretty sound organization, the OPCW. I know how we tried to influence the IAEA with regard to Iraq and other countries. I know how, as I said before, we tried to undermine the ICC - we being Washington. So I'm here as an impartial observer, if you will, but my real interest is in, as I think most of your interest is probably in, is keeping this international organization sound. The OPCW is a very important organization. It represents one of the few more heinous utensils of warfare, if you will, that we have largely gotten rid of and I would like to see totally eradicated from the face of the earth. And I'm a military

professional telling you that there is no good to be had out of chemical weapons, period. Over. Conversation ended. So we need to make sure this organization has the power and the backing and the support to do its job and to make sure that we fulfill these promises that nation states make about not having these heinous weapons. So that's my perspective on it. That's why I'm here. And I'll be glad to answer questions regarding that perspective if we have some later on. Thank you for having me again.

TEXT SCREEN:

Later in the meeting, Lawrence Wilkerson delivered closing comments.

LW: Thank you. And let me say, first of all, that as a military professional, I welcome all the powerful, strong statements from each of the states against chemical weapons and against their use, their stockpiling - against their very existence. Warm words to this military professionals heart.

Second, I thought - I have no experience with this Arria-Formula process, but I thought that it was conducted or set up so that we could do things on a little bit less usual, shall I say, basis. But what I've heard here today is everything but a discussion of the Duma incident and the OPCW performance with regard to that. What I've heard is everything from Sergey Lavrov's promise to Ukraine to a tour de force or tour de horribilis, if you will, of Syria's atrocious or alleged atrocious actions over the past few years. And it has nothing to do, really, with the integrity of the OPCW, which to me seems at least has a high possibility of being very much undermined with regard to the Duma incident, April 18th.

So that's the one thing I see about this discussion that was a little bit disconcerting is that we're not looking at that one particular incident where there is evidence that its integrity was undermined. One incident of undermining the OPCW or the IAEA or any other international organizations, professionalism and conduct of its mission is bad and should be looked at and should be investigated. And the appropriate people should be reprimanded, held of accountability or whatever. I know that's not something we do in the international community very often. If we did, my president, George W. Bush, would be up on war crimes, torture, clearly a war crime. Maybe even the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was a war crime. Certainly Kofi Annan made statements that it was. But I'm looking at the Duma incident. And I'm looking at the particulars of that incident. And I'm looking at what looks to me like a very convoluted process that produced a good report and then produced a report that was more politically influenced than it was a report on the facts. So that's just the comment I have after listening to all of your conversations, which I enjoyed. And as I said, and I will repeat, I particularly enjoyed - my heart is throbbing from the fact that you all condemned chemical weapons and that you all seem to be sincere in that regard, regardless of your political disposition. And that's great. That's a wonderful thing. And I think the OPCW needs to be supported in all of its integrity with regard to policing that. Thank you.

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