

Dan Kaszeta's Email to Mr. Denis O'Brien

From: Dan Kaszeta <dan@kaszeta.org>
Date: 4 November 2013 10:14:30 GMT
To: xxxxxxxx
Subject: Sorry you take umbrage with my article

Mr. O'Brien,

Thank you for reading my article in CBRNe World. This is an area with much debate and strong opinions, and I see that my thoughts, as they have evolved since 8/21, have provoked comment and reaction of every conceivable type.

I have read your interesting riposte on Scribd. Several people had forwarded it to my attention, some of them hoping to elicit an angry response out of me. But there's no point in me getting angry as it just distorts the debate. I do want to thank you for not engaging in overt personal attacks.

I myself have a few reactions to your comments:

1. CBRNe World is a commercial magazine run as a business. They have to take paid advertizing to pay the bills. Please don't get angry at me for that fact. I don't have any control over what page my article will run on, or what ads may run next to my article. It's completely out of my control. If it were up to me, I'd love to put up a link to my article as a PDF without the ads in it, but CBRNe World is not structured that way. I freely admit that I get paid by CBRNe to write the articles. I need to make a living. If it weren't for the advertisers, I couldn't get paid for writing in it. It is not an academic publication.
2. CBRNe World has an editor. His name is Gwyn Winfield, and he is a reasonable man. If you have serious issue with how he runs his magazine, feel free to take it up with him. And if you have a serious rebuttal to my article, or any other, he's often willing to print a reply.
3. I was limited to 2000 words and I think that I did a fairly good job of cramming some complex and obtuse ideas into 2000 words. But I can see that not everyone can follow what I was thinking. But CBRNe World is not going to print a 6000 word article from me. (I once got away with 2500, but that's about the limit.)
4. The premise of my article was not to explain the whole 8/21 incident. That will take a whole book and a lot of information to which we just don't have access to. The purpose of the "Managing the Deficit" article was to be a thought exercise to see if my old military offensive chemical target analysis background and the old doctrinal documents in my possession could shed light on how the Syrian military might have had to plan such an attack. You correctly assess that this raises as many questions as it solves. More

importantly, however, I don't claim that my article solves anything.

5. I know full well that a 155mm howitzer round is not a 330-360mm rocket. I used the M121 round for two reasons. First, because I know down to the ounce how much Sarin is in one. Second, because I know its target analysis chart was the one most well grounded in field trials in Utah in the 1950s and 1960s. To my knowledge it was never ever fired from a M198, by the way.

The point was less to figure out the exact number of munitions but to figure out the order of magnitude quantity of agent required. I thought I was clear in my math in converting 155mm howitzer rounds to net agent quantity. I see your accuracy argument, but I think it is less relevant than you do. Chemical weapons are by design area effect weapons not precision munitions. Heck, I wasn't thinking that I could ever account for the agent down to the ounce, I was trying to come up with an order of

6. I'm sorry that I can't explain chemical target analysis methodology and use of the charts in great detail in my article. It used to get taught in several weeks of training, and I can't reproduce a 300 page manual and three week program of instruction in 2000 words. I used about 15 different charts and tables from a number of different sources. The three printed in the article are only the tip of the iceberg, and it was not feasible for the editors to give up a large swathe of a commercial publication to reprint large extracts from old US Chemical Corps manuals only as a graphic for my article.

7. I admit that the available weather data is simply insufficient for complex use in this instance. The "about 10 mph" figure I have is from two anecdotal sources. But actually all I needed was a rough order of magnitude guess. It wasn't still, it wasn't 20 mph. Using one table, I needed to know the wind was 3, 5, or 8 mph. I used the 8 mph bit of the table as it gave me the most conservative estimate. On the other M121 table, I needed to use either a below or above 10 mph breakpoint. But either way it gives me such a large amount of Sarin required. Temperature is broadly important, but not to the degree you suggest, in the first few minutes. If I was doing a downwind hazard prediction, the granularity of the wind data would be important. It is less important (but not unimportant) for the Also, weather data for large cities varies a lot from point to point.

8. Again, I apologize for not being able to explain Felim McMahon's geolocating work. The 63 ha area is a figure that he gave me in a complex and lengthy discussion that, again, I cannot adequately summarize in a 2000 word article. Of interest, this is the smallest target area calculation I could reasonably agree with, given the work that I have seen on the subject. You are correct in that a larger area would require more agent.

9. Hydrolysis and relative humidity factor into the medium and long term fate of Sarin, but don't factor as much into the immediate casualty effects.

Hydrolysis of Sarin is not instantaneous. It takes hours to days. There simply wasn't a way to factor 56% relative humidity into the charts that I used.

Indirectly, 56% RH in a relatively arid does give me some indication that an inversion atmospheric condition existed at the time.

10. Casualty figures are a source of great variance. I agree with you there. My point was simply to establish a range of low to high. I am not hanging my hat on any one particular one. I was looking for the order-of-magnitude guess.

One of my objectives was to come up with a rough order of magnitude estimate as to how much material may have been used. I believe that I have done this, with a range from 370-ish kg to 4400-ish kg, with the solid realization that, like most things, a normal distribution may be in effect here with the real answer somewhere in the middle of that range, and with many good reasons to disregard 370 kg as the 2 percentile guess and 4400 kg as the 98 percentile guess. The fact that we are talking about something on the order of magnitude of a ton of Sarin and not a pint or a gallon has tremendous implications as to the supply chain that led to its being used.

There are other comments I can make, but I will keep it to these 10 for now. I hope that you take this in the non-confrontational spirit in which is it intended.

Regards,

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