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| Jihad Report Apr 07, 2018 -Apr 13, 2018 | |
| Attacks | **27** |
| Killed | **269** |
| Injured | **184** |
| Suicide Blasts | **3** |
| Countries | **8** |

**The Princess and the Abortion**

The Story of Deanna Falchook

At 18, I received a great job working at Walt Disney World as a singer. More than 5,000 people auditioned to fill 10 positions for singer/dancers (five women and five men).

I performed five shows daily in front of Cinderella’s Castle, singing such classics as “When You Wish Upon a Star,” and “Some Day My Prince Will Come.” This was a dream come true for me. I was frequently hired to sing in the recording studio as the voice of Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty. I was paid well, had my own apartment, and enjoyed life independently as a professional singing princess and entertainer.

Shortly after starting my contract at Disney, I met a charming, 22-year-old prince named Dave who worked as an engineer in the theme park. We were highly attracted to each other and spent most of our time off work together. Dave eventually moved in with me.

Within a few months of living under the same roof, I became pregnant. This is where the fairy tale between Dave and I took a turn. He made it clear that he had no interest in “settling down” or making that type of commitment. In fact, he let me know he was experienced with knowing about “places” that would take care of the “problem.” I soon realized he was not my Prince Charming.

I had always wanted to be a mother. But I had learned early in my life from family members who championed [the rhetoric of Planned Parenthood](http://www.bartleby.com/1013/7.html) that becoming a mother before doing what was perceived as successful was unacceptable. I remember conversations as a little girl where professing my desire to grow up to be a mother repeatedly met this type of response: “Honey, you can be anything in the world. Why would you want to be JUST a mother. You can be a mother AFTER you become successful.”

With this conversation in mind, an unwilling prince, and the echoes of anti-mother messaging steering me away from motherhood “too young,” I had an abortion on a Friday. I immediately regretted it. I curled up in the fetal position in my bed sobbing through the entire weekend.

## I Just Wanted to Die, Too

Dave had friends over and played video games in the room adjacent to mine, seeming to party in relief as I tried to silence my louder cries in a pillow. My mind swirled with thoughts of wanting to rewind my decision. I kept reminding myself that just two days before, I had been pregnant. I felt hollow inside.

On Monday, I got up and went to work. I wondered if anyone would notice that I had been crying all weekend. I put on my costume. I worked hard to put my eye makeup on to cover the tear stains. I fixed my hair, brushed on my blush, applied lipstick, and tried to smile through the song and dance. I sang “So This is Love,” and “How Lovely It Will Be,” but it felt like an out-of-body experience.

I continued to sing on the castle stage daily. Dave continued to play his games. I was like an empty automatic doll trying to sing princess songs. Dave was happy, relieved, and distant. This performance went on for about 7-8 months. My legs were giving out and my voice was not as strong because I cried too much on my days off.

Eventually, I gave notice and quit my dream job, hoping to find healing somehow. I was crushed and broke up with the man I once thought I loved, knowing it was necessary. Dave was relieved and detached as my feelings toward him cooled. With the beautiful castle days behind me, I could no longer muster the energy to sing or whistle a happy tune. I walked away and wanted to die, as Cinderella’s Castle (my happy place) faded in the distance.

I spent the following days and months in deep prayer, reading, and counseling. I was eventually healed by the grace of God. I reconnected to my Christian faith. I learned to forgive myself and knew I was forgiven. But I had to go through a process of deep reflection, intercession, and understanding regarding my abortion experience and the deep struggles I faced afterwards.

The path through this type of grief is grueling, sad, and exhausting. Years later, I met a great man and became a mother. I am healed now and proudly the mother of seven kids (two by birth, five by international adoption). We now live within miles of Cinderella’s Castle in Orlando. And I can sing again.

## Planned Parenthood Wants More Women to Feel Pain

Recently, Planned Parenthood tweeted, “We Need a Disney Princess Who Had an Abortion.” I am a former Disney princess who had an abortion. It is not easy to share a story that represents my deepest personal loss and sadness. But I also will not remain silent knowing what I know.

Through the healing process, I have learned some very important lessons. Planned Parenthood’s method to marginalize motherhood is intentional and still very much alive. It seems the organization is now considering promoting abortion to toddlers who are happily wearing their tiaras like Cinderella. As a grown woman who has battled victorious over demons, slayed the dragons, and survived the poison of evil rhetoric, I cannot stand voiceless and let intentional abortion indoctrination drift in like a cloud to hypnotize my sons and daughters.

The tweet overlaid something sinister. Since its founding, this organization has sold a death message. Among many other horrible things, Planned Parenthood Founder [Margaret Sanger once wrote](http://www.bartleby.com/1013/7.html)—insert scary music, echo effect, and voice of Maleficent— “The most merciful thing that the large family does to one of its infant members is to kill it.”

We do not need a Disney princess written by authors scripting a manipulated story that aims to glorify killing children. This kind of strategic propaganda contributed to my own personal tragedy. Abortion doesn’t empower. It is a tragic tale rarely told because the abortion architects would need to admit the damage it has caused women like myself (and obviously their children).

## Princess Tales Are at Heart the Exact Opposite Message

The stories little girls need to continue to hear are already exemplified in the fairy tales that teach us about goodness and truth. It has always been the witches plotting to confuse the princesses, attempting to lure them away from their noble pursuits, pushing them out of their destined castles with evil intent to smother their dreams. These evil ones appear powerful, but always end up falling off cliffs or being struck down by the goodness of truth.

Cinderella is a story of making something beautiful out of the life surprises that threaten to burn us.

Had I listened more to Cinderella’s story as a child, I would have avoided my greatest regret. My abortion occurred because I allowed myself to become influenced by twisted stories from an organization with an agenda to kill my greatest calling.

Cinderella, battling through unplanned circumstances as an orphan in the fire before being transformed into a sparkly princess and future queen, is a story that brings hope and teaches us about true empowerment. It’s a story of making something beautiful out of the life surprises that threaten to burn us.

Cinderella’s crown represents victory over the lies of evil women that told us we were dirty girls destined to sit in the cinders rather than future monarchs destined to rule. Princess fairy tales have lasted ages and teach women about goodness, mercy, kindness, power, perseverance, and strength in a world trying to whistle songs of death past little ears.

If a little girl wants to fulfill a dream, she needs to be reminded by good women who aren’t following a political agenda that she can be anything she wants to be, even if that means being a mother.

**Flash Point: American Anarchy**

If you’ve listened to X-Squared Radio for very long you know I’m fundamentally a libertarian. I do believe in the existence of a State, but I agree with the founding fathers that a monopoly of force is inherently, tyranny. It is not war with the people that keeps the State from removing our rights. It is the prospect of war with the people that keeps it in check. That is to say, the mechanics of disarming Americans is so messy and so impossible to imagine, that no body politic wants to try it.

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**At the beginning and end of the day, there are two possible ways for people to relate to each other, either voluntarily or coercively.** That is to say, they either work together for a mutual solution, or the majority takes it from the minority. Sorry, but that is Democracy, and that is bullying; plain and simple. It is the Democrat way to protest the electoral college every time they lose, and to stack the voting stations with foreign citizens who cannot be prevented from voting. It’s bullying. It’s mob rule.

And the State is pure institutionalized coercion. And as we have proven statistically, that’s increasingly true as technology advances. For 5,000 years, the whole world was ruled by one man with wooden ships. The Romans, the Egyptians, the Kings of England and the other globalist elitists kept the people immobile, upwardly and otherwise. Today it’s still ridiculous in most of the world, and less so in America. We can be and do anything we set our mind to, as long as the State gets out of our way. Enter, the army of Federal regulators.

Everything that needs doing can and will be done by the free market, by entrepreneurs who fill the needs of other people for a profit. The State has become a dead hand that imposes itself on society, ever since the birth of the Agency government in 1933. That belief makes me, of course, an anarchist of sorts.

People have a misconception about anarchists. We are not these violent people, running around in black capes with little round bombs. Those would be the soldiers of the deep State that break windows, burn cars, assault public speakers, and curse police. This is nonsense. Of course there are violent anarchists. There are violent florists. There are violent song writers. Violence, unlike the modus of the Progressives, has nothing to do with anarchism. Anarchism is simply a belief that ruling people isn’t necessary, that society organizes itself, that individuals own themselves, and the State is actually counterproductive. There is such a thing as the rule of law, but the actual application turns out to be more of rule by law.

**It’s always been a battle between the individual and the collective. The founding fathers and I are on the side of the individual.** I simply don’t believe anyone has a right to initiate violence against anyone else, and that such violence may be repelled by any means necessary; including deadly force. Is that an unreasonable belief?

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The argument can be made that the largest monopoly of power today is not some Colombian cocaine gang, it’s the US Government. And they’re far more dangerous. They have a legal monopoly to do anything they want with you. Don’t conflate the government with America—it’s a separate entity, with its own interests, as distinct as General Motors or the Mafia. I’d rather deal with the Mafia than I would with any agency of the US Government. At least they have a code that cannot be broken, and they each and every one care about doing their job.

Even under the worst circumstances, the Mafia will agree that they take a back seat to the crooks in government. The Agency government has mutated into a domestic multicultural empire that assesses taxes, sets fees, fines, and enforcement actions on the people, and the people have no representation in that government. That is the purest definition of Tyranny.

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**And getting more dangerous as the State grows more powerful.** The growth of the State is actually destroying society. Over the last 100 years the State has grown at an exponential rate, and it’s the enemy of the individual. I see no reason why this trend, which has been in motion and accelerating for so long, is going to stop. And certainly no reason why it’s going to reverse.

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When there is another 9/11—and we will have another one—they’re going to lock down this country like one of their numerous new prisons. I was afraid that the shooting deaths and injuries of several hundred people in Las Vegas on October 1st might be it. But, strangely, the news cycle has driven on, leaving scores of serious unanswered questions in its wake. And about zero public concern.

**Art Bell Has Gone Home**

Longtime radio host Art Bell died Friday at his Pahrump home, the Nye County Sheriff’s Office announced. He was 72.

In the years before satellite radio, when people drove cross country, the only way to stay connected to a radio program was to access, if you were lucky, an AM program bouncing off the ionosphere out of Chicago or St. Louis or Nashville, Tennessee. That station, late at night was Art Bell’s paranormal-themed show, “Coast to Coast AM.” His iconic voice and brilliant mind with authors, researchers and witnesses of various strangeness reached tens of millions of listeners. It can be argued that late-night AM radio existed, only because of the powerful listener base Art Bell had built. His program was syndicated on about 500 North American stations in the 1990s before he left the nightly show in 2002. He broadcasted the show from Pahrump’s KNYE 95.1 FM, a station he founded.

Bell retired several times in his career, which included a short-lived show on SiriusXM satellite radio in 2013. Returning to terrestrial radio afterward was not a difficult decision, [he told the Pahrump Valley Times in August 2013](https://pvtimes.com/news/legendary-art-bell-returning-to-airwaves/).

“That’s easy, because I love it,” he said at the time. “It’s my life, and that’s all I have ever done. I went through a lot of family problems, so that interrupted things, and I was overseas for four years, and that certainly interrupted things. I went back into radio because I love it.”:35

The show developed a cult following after he created it in 1993 and was touted as the country’s most listened to overnight radio program. It featured Bell expounding on topics as diverse as UFO sightings, Bigfoot and crop circles.

Bell retired in 2015 citing safety concerns for his family. His studios were located in his hometown of Pahrump, in Nye County, Nevada. He would never be able to return to his former American throne, because the legacy and empire he had founded had been adopted by new owners and new marketing teams.

The current host of the show, George Noory, said in a statement: “Art was a legend – a radio icon who went against the grain and developed an amazing show ... His impact on my life is beyond words. He will be missed, but I know he is now on another journey.”

“Coast to Coast AM” airs on more than 600 stations nationwide and is broadcast Monday through Sunday from 1-5 a.m. ET, according to Premiere Networks, a subsidiary of iHeartMedia, the leading audio company in the United States. It is the #8 radio program in radio nationwide. Its listeners are an extremely powerful and well-informed marketplace. Thousands of conferences, authors, and small businesses have been formed and grown in large part to their presence on Coast to Coast AM. Noory is a tireless host of those conferences, often being on the road every single week to MC an event or add his smooth voice to those venues.

Bell was inducted into the Nevada Broadcasters Association Hall of Fame in 2006. He did not attend the presentation.

In 2008, Bell was inducted into the National Radio Hall of Fame.

Bell was born in Jacksonville, North Carolina, on June 17, 1945. He served in the U.S. Air Force as a medic during the Vietnam War.

According to the Coast to Coast AM website, Bell was an FCC licensed radio technician at age 13. He also set a Guinness World Record for a solo broadcast marathon, at more than 116 hours, while working as a DJ in Okinawa, Japan, the website said.

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**What Do Syrians Say?**

In the wake of the allied missile strikes on chemical weapon facilities in Syria on Saturday morning, the main questions seemed to be what Russia’s response would be and whether or not the missile attacks signaled a deepening role for the United States in the complicated civil war in Syria.

One question that wasn’t oft addressed, however, was how everyday Syrians responded to the strikes against the Assad regime.

[Fox News](http://www.foxnews.com/world/2018/04/14/inside-syria-reactions-to-us-strikes-range-from-excitement-to-fear.html)‘ Hollie McKay was on the ground inside Syria and collected reactions from some of the residents there. While emotions were mixed, the general mood seemed to be in favor of the strike on three Syrian chemical weapons facilities.

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“The explosions were so loud,” Obada Alstof, a 21-year-old opposition activist, told Fox News after the attack.

“We had no idea what was happening but we immediately expected that the international coalition was targeting the regime locations.”

“We hope for the future that strikes will expand to include all [the Syrian regime](https://conservativetribune.com/john-kerry-foolish-syria-claim/?ff_source=push) and its supported militias’ military locations,” he added, “because the regime and its allies are committing massacres against the civilians every day.”

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Said al-Hamawi, a 20-year-old business student in Damascus, says he saw one of the rockets heading to its target before being shot down by Syrian anti-aircraft guns.

“It exploded in the sky. It was very clear. There were far explosions in the sky, but that was the clearest,” Hamawi told Fox News.

### Do you think Bashar al-Assad should be deposed?

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Yes No

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“I hope that this attack will achieve almost Assad’s weapons destruction, which will rid the Syrians civilians of weapons that will be used against them.”

Another Damascus resident was more apprehensive.

“Early morning today, I woke up because of the sound of Syrian anti-aircraft. I did not see the explosions but I heard the sounds,” Zilal Mansour, 33, said.

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“These were weaker compared to the sounds of shelling in Al-Ghouta, although I knew that military area near my residential ‘Barza’ was being targeted.”

“I did not feel anything, I was not sad or happy. Assad should be punished,” she added. “But would [this strike](https://conservativetribune.com/haunting-early-morning-syria?ff_source=push) be like the previous one? Or is it for pressing him for political concessions?”

**RELATED:** [**Russian Ambassador Sends Chilling Threat to United States Following Syria Attack**](https://conservativetribune.com/russian-ambassador-sends-chilling-threat-to-united-states-following-syria-attack/?ff_source=push)

Some residents said that warnings from the Russians made the strikes less effective than they could have been.

“Assad during the previous days transferred many aircraft and weapons from their places to another one. Most of the targeted areas were empty and only the building has been damaged,” said Damascus resident Ayman Bakla, 53.

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“Assad came out on the television a little while ago, going to his office with a message to the world that ‘I am fine and your beating did not affect.’”

Other residents were afraid to speak out of the possibility of retaliation.

“If we know the U.S. will stay here long-term to protect us, it is no problem, we can speak freely,” a resident of Manbij said.

“But until then, we don’t know what will happen. We don’t want to see our people [killed in retaliation](https://conservativetribune.com/assad-punked-obama-2014/?ff_source=push). The situation is too sensitive.”

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Overall, however, one can gather that the mood on the ground is not in favor of Assad, whose murderous regime has laid waste to an entire country during seven abominable years of civil war. The fact that Russia and Iran continue to support the regime is entirely indefensible; if they wish that the people of Syria were to truly know peace, they would withdraw their support from this hideous monster at once. It’s a telling sign that Syrians are fed up with both their government and those who would prop it up.

**Syrian Attack Site**

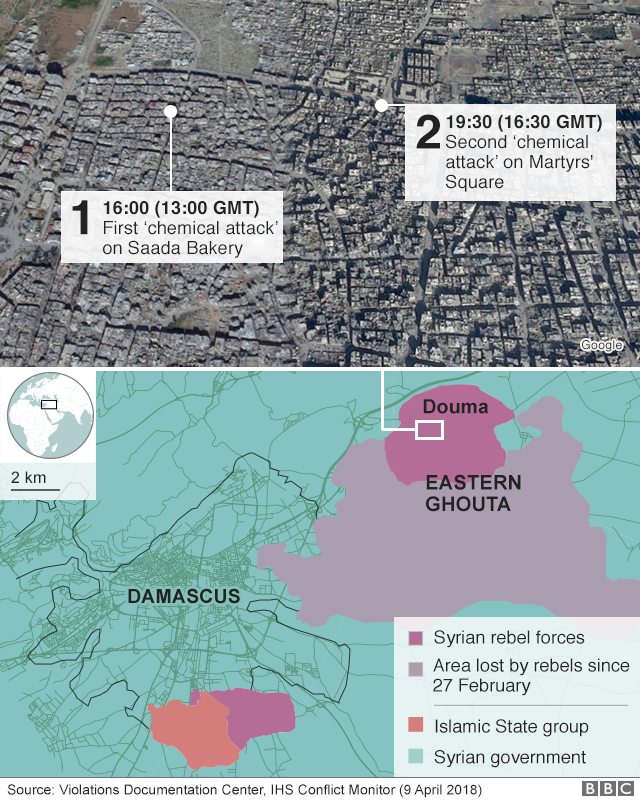
**Syrian opposition activists, rescue workers and medics say more than 40 people were killed on 7 April in a suspected chemical attack on Douma, which was the last rebel-held town in the Eastern Ghouta region.**

France has said it has "proof" that "chemical weapons were used - at least chlorine - and that they were used by Bashar al-Assad's regime".

The Syrian government denies the allegation, and its key ally Russia says it has "irrefutable evidence" that the incident was "staged" with the help of the UK.

## Why was Douma being bombed?

In February, forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad launched an assault on the Eastern Ghouta that has reportedly left more than 1,700 civilians dead.



In March, troops split the region into three pockets - the largest of which was around Douma, home to between 80,000 and 150,000 people. Facing defeat, rebel groups in the other two pockets agreed to be evacuated to northern Syria.

But the group controlling Douma, Jaysh al-Islam, continued to hold out. On 6 April, after negotiations with the government stalled, air strikes resumed.

## What happened on 7 April?

The bombardment continued for a second day, with dozens of people reportedly killed or injured by conventional munitions before the suspected chemical attack.

Activists from the Violations Documentation Center (VDC), which records alleged violations of international law in Syria, reported [**two separate incidents of bombs believed to contain toxic substances being dropped by the Syrian Air Force**](http://vdc-sy.net/suspected-chemical-attack-douma-city/).

The first occurred at approximately 16:00 (13:00 GMT) and saw the Saada bakery on Omar Ibn Al-Khattab street in north-western Douma targeted, the VDC said.

Image copyrightAFPImage captionActivists say Douma came under intense aerial bombardment on Saturday

It cited a rescue worker from the Syria Civil Defence as saying he smelt chlorine in the air after the strike, but that he could not determine its source.

"We later discovered the bodies of people who had suffocated from toxic gases. They were in closed spaces, sheltering from the barrel bombs, which may have caused their quick death as no-one heard their screams," he added.

The VDC said the second incident took place not far to the east, near Martyrs' Square, at approximately 19:30.

[**At 19:45, more than 500 patients - most of them women and children - were brought to medical facilities with symptoms indicative of exposure to a chemical agent**](https://www.sams-usa.net/press_release/sams-syria-civil-defense-condemn-chemical-attack-douma/), according to the Syria Civil Defence and the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS), a relief organisation that supports hospitals in rebel-held areas.



Media captionUnverified video shows children being treated after the alleged gas attack

The patients showed signs of "respiratory distress, central cyanosis (blue skin or lips), excessive oral foaming, corneal burns, and the emission of chlorine-like odour", a joint statement issued on Sunday said. One woman who died had convulsions and pinpoint pupils.

Rescue workers searching homes in the affected area also found the bodies of people with oral foaming, cyanosis, and corneal burns, the statement added.

The Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations (UOSSM), which supports hospitals in rebel-held Syria, also said [**it received reports of two incidents**](http://www.bfmtv.com/international/attaque-chimique-presumee-en-syrie-une-substance-mortelle-ajoutee-au-chlore-selon-une-ong-1415252.html).

Image copyrightREUTERSImage captionPatients were hosed down with water to remove any chemicals on their skin

People were treated for breathing difficulties and irritation of the eyes following the first, the UOSSM said. After the second, patients were brought to hospital smelling strongly of a chlorine-like substance and presenting symptoms that included cyanosis, foaming of the mouth, and cornea irritation, it added.

[**A medical student working at a hospital told the BBC he had treated a man who died**](https://twitter.com/joelmgunter/status/983086413167190016?s=21). "His pupils were dilated and he had foam in his mouth. His heart was very slow. Then he coughed blood into his mouth as well," he said.

Two videos circulated by the opposition activist group Douma Revolution showed what it said were [**the bodies of children, women and men found in one building**](https://www.facebook.com/Douma.Revolution.2011/videos/1739279519486289/), which is believed to be located south-west of Martyrs' Square. Some had foam coming out of their mouths and noses.

## How many people died?

The World Health Organization said it had received reports from its local "health cluster partners" of [**43 deaths related to symptoms consistent with exposure to highly toxic chemicals"**](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/statements/2018/chemical-attacks-syria/en/).

The Syria Civil Defence and SAMS said rescue workers found 42 people dead in their homes. One person was declared dead on arrival at a hospital, and another six died while receiving treatment, they added. An earlier, now deleted tweet by the Syria Civil Defence put the number dead at more than 150.

The UOSSM initially reported that 70 people were confirmed dead. On Monday, [**it revised down the figure to at least 42, but said it was expected to rise**](https://www.uossm.us/42_confirmed_dead_in_massive_chemical_attack_in_ghouta?recruiter_id=659).

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a UK-based monitoring group, said air strikes on 6 and 7 April killed almost 100 people. It said they included 21 who died as a result of suffocation, but that it was unable to identify the cause.

[**The British investigative journalism website, Bellingcat, said it had counted at least 34 bodies**](https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2018/04/11/open-source-survey-alleged-chemical-attacks-douma-7th-april-2018/) in the two videos circulated by Douma Revolution.

Bellingcat also assessed that the building near Martyrs' Square where the bodies were filmed was [**visited by Russian military personnel on 9 April**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7QCPj5nUwkg).

## What could they have been exposed to?

[**Experts say it is impossible to know whether a person has been exposed to a chemical agent from looking at a video or photo**](https://www.icrc.org/en/document/effective-killer-five-things-you-need-know-about-chemical-weapons). The only way to confirm contamination is to take samples and analyse them in a laboratory. However, the UN and other international humanitarian organisations were unable to get into Douma because of the government's siege.

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) says a fact-finding mission has been "gathering information from all available sources and analysing it". T[**he global watchdog has sent a team to Syria that will start its work on 14 April**](https://www.opcw.org/news/article/opcw-will-deploy-fact-finding-mission-to-douma-syria/).

The Syria Civil Defence and SAMS believe those who died suffocated as a result of exposure to toxic chemicals, most likely an organophosphate - a compound grouping associated with pesticides and nerve agents.

The UOSSM also concluded that the [**symptoms of the casualties were consistent with exposure to a nerve agent, possibly one mixed with chlorine**](https://www.opcw.org/protection/types-of-chemical-agent/nerve-agents/). Dr Raphal Pitti of UOSSM France said he thought "chlorine was used to conceal the use of Sarin", a nerve agent.

On 14 April, France [**released a document based on "open source information and declassified intelligence" which it said pointed "with a high degree of confidence" to Syrian regime involvement.**](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/syria/article/national-assessment-document-on-chemical-attack-of-7-april-2018-douma-eastern)

The United States said [**the reported symptoms were "consistent with an asphyxiation agent and of a nerve agent of some type"**](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-statedept/douma-symptoms-consistent-with-nerve-agent-u-s-state-department-idUSKBN1HG2IB).

Two unnamed US officials also told NBC News on 12 April that [**tests of blood and urine samples suggested the presence of chlorine and a nerve agent**](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/mideast/u-s-has-blood-samples-show-nerve-agent-syria-gas-n865431).

## What does the Syrian government say?

[**The Syrian government, which has repeatedly denied ever using chemical weapons, accused rebels of "fabricating" the reports**](https://sana.sy/en/?p=133561).

Syria's permanent representative to the UN, Bashar al-Jaafari, accused Western powers of falsely accusing the government "to prepare the ground for an aggression against my country, just as the United States and the United Kingdom did in Iraq in 2003".

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on 13 April that it had "irrefutable evidence that this was yet another attack, staged with the participation of special services of one state that is striving to be at the forefront of the Russophobic campaign".

Image copyrightAFPImage captionSyrian government ground forces advanced towards Douma on Saturday

Mr Lavrov avoided naming that country, but [**Russian defence ministry spokesman Maj Gen Igor Konashenkov later said the UK was "directly involved in the provocation"**](https://apnews.com/aa5d345988a64422a2b1cb7f5ddc41f8/The-Latest:-UN-chief-says-Mideast-'peril'-threatens-security). He did not provide any evidence and a British diplomat called the allegation "bizarre" and a "blatant lie".

Russia's permanent representative to the UN, Vassily Nebenzia, told the Security Council on 9 April that [**Russian military specialists had visited Douma and taken soil samples that showed no presence of nerve agents or substances containing chlorine**](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.8225).

"At the local hospital, no-one with symptoms of sarin or chlorine poisoning had been admitted," he added. "No bodies of people who had died from being poisoned were found, and the medical staff and residents had no information about where they might have been buried.

He also noted that an opposition activist had posted a [**video purportedly showing a chemical bomb made out of yellow gas canister**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCZA3thrjew) that had landed in a bedroom in a building in Douma. Mr Nebenzia said the video was staged, adding: "The trajectory of the alleged bomb is entirely unnatural. It fell through the roof and landed gently on a wooden bed without damaging it in any way and was clearly placed there."

## How has the international community reacted?

US President Donald Trump has been convinced since 9 April that there was a [**"heinous attack on innocent Syrians with banned chemical weapons"**](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-cabinet-meeting-7/).

The US, backed by Britain and France, followed up with air strikes on 14 April on targets near Homs and in Damascus designed, in Mr Trump's words, "to establish a strong deterrent against the production, spread, and use of chemical weapons". Some reports speak of targets hit elsewhere.

About 100 missiles appear to have been used - double the number fired into Syria in 2017 in response to a chemical attack on the town of Khan Sheikhoun that killed more than 80 people.

[**United Nations Secretary General António Guterres said he was outraged by the reports from Douma**](https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2018-04-10/statement-secretary-general-syria) and warned that "any confirmed use of chemical weapons, by any party to the conflict and under any circumstances, is abhorrent and a clear violation of international law".



Media captionThe US president has said "nothing's off the table" - so what options are on the table?

## When were chemical weapons used before?

In August 2013, rockets containing Sarin were fired at several opposition-held suburbs in the Eastern and Western Ghouta, killing hundreds of people. [**UN experts confirmed that Sarin was used in the attack**](http://undocs.org/A/68/663), but they were not asked to ascribe any blame.

Western powers said only Syrian government forces could have carried out the attack. President Assad denied the allegation, but he did agree to sign the Chemical Weapons Convention and destroy Syria's declared chemical arsenal.

[**Experts from a joint UN-OPCW mission also said they were confident that government forces used Sarin in an attack in April 2017 on the rebel-held Khan Sheikhoun**](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1734930.pdf), which reportedly killed more than 80 people.

President Assad dismissed the attack as a fabrication, but the US carried a cruise missile strike on a Syrian airbase in retaliation.

The UN-OPCW mission also found that government forces used chlorine as a weapon on at least three occasions during the civil war

**US Space Force Seeks Recruits**

The Air Force Space Command last week posted a "sources sought" notice for the operations and maintenance of a network of space-staring telescopes known as the Ground-based Electro-Optical Deep Space Surveillance System.

The Air Force is sizing up the market and not seeking bids yet. Responses are due April 23.

The notice came from the 21st Contracting Squadron at Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado. The squadron is looking for help providing 16-hour-a-day, seven-day a week operations of GEODSS sites at Socorro, New Mexico; Diego Garcia, British Indian Ocean Territory; and Maui, Hawaii. A fourth GEODSS site in South Korea was closed in 1993. [The Most Dangerous Space Weapons Concepts Ever]

According to the Air Force, the three sites provide nearly complete coverage of the Earth's geosynchronous orbital belt and deliver nearly 80 percent of all geosynchronous observations. The data is sent to the Joint Space Operations Center at Vandenberg Air Force Base, California, and to U.S. Strategic Command's Joint Intelligence Center at Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska.

This is the military's primary deep-space tracking system. The first site at Socorro, at the White Sands Missile Range, started operation in 1982. The GEODSS uses nine large telescopes at the three locations to track objects by using reflected sunlight, so it can only operate on clear nights. It can likely detect objects as small as a half-meter in geosynchronous orbits.

The telescopes were upgraded in the mid-2000s under a program called Deep Stare. Analog sensors were replaced with digital focal plane arrays. The Air Force Space Command noted that the upgrade gave the GEODDS sites "some of the most accurate and sensitive optical telescopes in the world." A fact sheet says the system can track objects as small as a basketball more than 20,000 miles away and is a "vital part of the AFSPC's space surveillance network."

Harris Corporation currently does contractor support work at all three GEODSS sites. A one-year $8.5 million contract modification was awarded to the company May 2017 and runs through April 14

An industry consultant who is familiar with the GEODSS said the maintenance and operation of these sites is labor intensive and "cumbersome logistically," with facilities located in remote areas. "In my opinion, the Air Force ought to put all the GEODSS sites into a museum and just outsource the collection of ground based space situational awareness data to companies that are already doing this job well," he said. "There is no reason why the collection of SSA data has to be done by the military."

SSA efforts are drawing increased attention as space is now considered a battlefront. Having up-to-the-minute information on space objects would allow satellite operators fly spacecraft away from potential threats. The SSA task is becoming more complex with the proliferation of space junk orbiting the Earth.

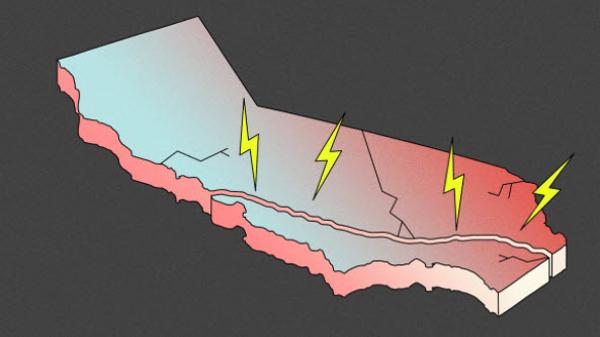
The Air Force and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency developed a more advanced Space Surveillance Telescope to supplement the older systems. The SST is located at the White Sands Missile Range and operated by the Air Force Space Command and the Royal Australian Air Force to track space debris.

DARPA said the SST has moved space situational awareness from seeing only a few large objects at a time through the equivalent of a drinking straw, to a "windshield" view with 10,000 objects at a time, each as small as a softball. SST can search an area larger than the continental United States in seconds and survey the entire geosynchronous belt within its field of view — one quarter of the sky — multiple times in one night

**Deep State Garrote**

The Donald seems to be taking a Deep Breath on his Syria bombfest, but the Deep State has him by the orange hairs. So we doubt the delay will last much longer. [he didn't!]

**That's because our Art of the Deal genius is getting bamboozled yet again.** They are telling him that wiping out up to a dozen Syrian airfields, military installations and a dog-eared factory or two that can be identified as chemical weapons sites will amount to some pretty serious Shock & Awe where it counts: That is, the mere witnessing of it will cause the Fat Boy of Pyongyang to brown his ample trousers, thereby getting his "mind right" for the upcoming summit.

[[](https://www.zerohedge.com/news/2018-04-14/link)](https://www.zerohedge.com/news/2018-04-14/link)

**That's exactly the kind of macho-bargainer stuff that the Donald thrives on, and is further proof that the Deep State has figured out exactly how to press his buttons.**

To be sure, Trump is no innocent victim. He voluntarily made himself hostage to the War Party by surrounding himself with failed generals and the most rabid war-mongers to be found in the Imperial City----John Bolton, Mike Pompeo and Gina Haspel.

Indeed, you have to wonder. How could anyone with even a half-baked notion of America First think that a hard core interventionist like John Bolton should be brought up right close and personal to the POTUS ear lobes, Walrus mustache and all?

**But whatever the Donald was thinking when he made such horrendous choices for his top national security posts, these denizens of the War Party have wasted no time shoving their own agenda right down his throat.**

And at the top of that agenda is systematic, relentless escalation of provocations against Russia and Iran. That's because confrontation with these demonized states is the best way to keep Imperial Washington (and therefore the entire country) on a war-footing and the national security gravy train overflowing with fiscal largesse.

As we indicated in Part 1, the impending attack on Syria is actually a shot across the bow aimed at Tehran and Moscow. The cover story is simply a humanitarian sounding ruse. Ostensibly, Bashar Assad is being administered a good hard spanking via a barrage of cruise missile birch switches.

**That begs the question, of course, of how homeland security is actually enhanced by selectively spanking some malefactors and not others.**

In this case, even the surely bogus claim that 40 civilians were gassed in Douma hardly compares to the 10,000 civilians that have been slaughtered by American bombs delivered by the Saudi air force in Yemen; or the thousands of anti-government prisoners that have been summarily executed by General al-Sisi in Egypt under this stewardship of Washington's $1.2 billion annual stipend; or the thousands of civilians that Israel has killed during its periodic "lawn-mowing" exercises on the Gaza Strip.

Obviously, Washington shouldn't even be in the spanking business because no one appointed America as the world's policeman or moral proctor. But even if that were the true purpose (it's not) of the impending act of naked aggression against the sovereign government of Syria, you would think there at least ought to be a semblance of proof that the alleged chemical attack actually occurred.

Unlike in past Syrian incidents, in fact, the way is wide open for an honest determination of what actually happened. That's because the last rebel hold-outs in Eastern Ghouta are now all dead or have vacated the area on busses arranged by the Syrian government as part of the relocation deal that sent them to rebel-held Idlib province in the northwest.

**Consequently, Douma is now safe for western journalists, government officials and international investigators from the Organization for the Prevention of Chemical Warfare (OPCW) to visit the alleged sites of the attack and find the evidence.**

Of course, Syrian and Russian officials who have visited the area say there is no evidence of victims, bodies, chlorine residue or that the sole hospital in the community was ever over-run with victims of toxic chemical agents. That alone is remarkable given initial reports that there were upwards of a thousand victims of the purported attack.

But now the Russian government has gone a striking step further. They are claiming they have evidence that the whole thing was***staged.*** That is, that an incident which has the world on the brink of war was just another false flag attack of the kind that the barbaric jihadists attacking the Syrian government have serially orchestrated since the original Ghouta event and Obama's infamous "red line" of August 2013.

***A Russian government spokesman said the ministry had found those who took part in filming the rent-a-mob chemical attack in Syria’s Douma and these people told how the video had been shot.***

***"Today, the Russian defense ministry has other evidence proving the United Kingdom’s direct involvement in the organization of this provocation in Eastern Ghouta," he said***

***In his words, the so-called White Helmets were pressed by London in a period from April 3 to 6 to hurry up with the implementation of the planned provocation. "The White Helmets were told that in a period from April 3 to 6 Jaysh al-Islam militants would conduct a series of massive artillery bombings of Damascus. It would provoke a retaliation operation by government forces and the White Helmets were to use it to stage a provocation with an alleged use of chemical weapons," he said.***

***According to Konashenkov, officers of the Russian defense ministry spoke with two Syrian who had taken part in filming the framed-up attack. Both have medical diplomas and work with the emergency department of Douma’s hospital. The two men do not conceal their names. They told Russian officers that all those who had been taken to hospital during the filming had no symptoms of exposure to toxic agents.***

***"When the patients were receiving first aid unidentified people burst into the hospital, some were holding video cameras," the spokesman cited them as saying. "These people started shouting, fanning hysteria. They carried hose and douched all present with water crying out that all of them had been exposed to poisonous agents."***

***"The patients and their relatives yielded to panic and began to pour water on each other. After this scene was caught on video, these unidentified people fled," he added.***

***This is what is called evidence in the civilized world, he stressed, adding that Russia had repeatedly warned about provocations with the alleged use of chemical weapons against civilians plotted by militants in Eastern Ghouta.***

We don't know whether the Russian government is lying or not, but since the whole world has been invited to come and make its own determination, we doubt it. After all, they have produced local citizens from the Douma hospital and elsewhere in the community who say they witnessed the fabrication. If these witnesses and the Russians are lying, that will quickly become evident.

To the contrary, you can't bury the evidence---including the bodies--- of a chlorine attack that allegedly caused hundreds of deaths and injuries. If it happened, the OPCW investigators and journalists will fund it; and if they don't, it didn't.

Meanwhile, why in the world are they gathered in the Situations Room arguing about targets and how to minimize risks of a direct hit on Russian military personal, when the Donald could actually pick up the red phone and tell Putin that he'll have an investigation team on the ground at Douma tomorrow AM?

We have not doubt that Cool Hand Vlad would say "be my guest". And we also have no doubt that Pat Buchanan hit the nail on the head in his recent missive when he noted:

***We cannot forever fight other peoples’ wars without ending up on the same ash heap of history as the other world powers before us.***

***And why not talk directly to our adversaries there?***

***If Trump can talk to Kim Jong-un, who used an anti-aircraft gun to execute his uncle and had his half-brother murdered in a Malaysian airport with a chemical weapon, why cannot we talk to Assad?***

***In 1974, Richard Nixon flew to Damascus to establish ties to Assad’s father, the future “Butcher of Hama.” George H.W. Bush enlisted Hafez al-Assad and 4,000 Syrian troops in his Gulf War to liberate Kuwait.***

***All over this city, and across the Middle East, there are people who wish to conscript U.S. wealth and power to advance their goals and achieve their visions. Having let them succeed so often has diminished us as a superpower from what we were at the end of the Cold War.***

***This should stop, and the nation knows it.***

***Among the reasons Democrats nominated Barack Obama and America elected him was that his opponents, Hillary Clinton and John McCain, supported the Iraq war Obama opposed.***

***Among the reasons the Republican Party nominated Trump and the nation elected him was that he promised to take us out and keep us out of wars like the one in Syria.***

***Is it not ironic that today our War Party, which, almost to a man, loathed Trump and rejected his candidacy, is goading and cheering him on, deeper and deeper into the Syrian quagmire?***

And that gets us to the meat of the matter. Donald Trump has now been taken hostage by the machinery of the Deep State and has become the tool of its destructive agenda.

**For instance, John Bolton is an advocate of America Uber Alles---the very antithesis of America First. In fact, he is an emissary for what might be termed the "Bibi First" wing of the War Party.**

Netanyahu's entire misbegotten reign as head of the Israeli government has been based on demonizing Iran, thereby gluing together a motley coalition of rightwing religious and settler parties in the parliament.

**In the present circumstances, the over-riding agenda of the "Bibi First" wing is to ashcan the Iranian Nuke deal when it comes up for certification on May 12.**

That's because an Iran that rejoins the community of nations, reengages in trade and commerce with the rest of the world and adheres to the nuke deal, which it has every intention of doing if Washington sticks to its end of the bargain, is an Iran that puts the lie to the entire demonization campaign that has been conducted by the neocons in Washington and Israel for the past 25 years.

**Needless to say, that is a scenario that the War Party cannot abide. It would put Bibi Netanyahu out of business and severely erode the case for the hundreds of billions that are being wasted on Washington's conventional military capacities.**

After all, if Washington didn't have the Persian Gulf to police or a dog in the Sunni-Shiite religious and political struggles, it wouldn't be wasting $30 billion per pop on new aircraft carriers and their battle-group armadas.

**So the Deep State has moved heaven and earth to bring the Donald into its thrall**and to bury every vestige of his incipient pivot toward an honest and affordable national security policy based on America First.

***If the Tomahawk cruise missiles fly toward Syria over the weekend [they did], we will know that the capture has been complete; and that the Oval Office is now occupied by a hostage of the very Deep State that he campaigned against, and which, in any event, will soon sacrifice him to the vengeful furies of the Mueller witchunt.***

**The Facebook Wars**

I’m sure everyone is well aware of what transpired on Capitol Hill this past week. It was Mark Zuckerberg goes to Washington, to testify, or rather attempt (or not) to explain why Facebook blocks content and otherwise censors conservative voices.

Many, like internet sensations Diamond and Silk, have been at the center of this free-speech firestorm. This, thanks in large part to my man Ted Cruz and Rep. Billy Long. Their content was deemed by Facebook to be hate speech. In fact it is just dissenting opinion the left so fears.

Now, Zuckerberg could have simply stated that Facebook is a private company and as such can do whatever the heck they want regarding limiting free speech, and he would have been right. But he didn’t.

Some would argue that he was smart not to invoke this right. Instead his company will water down their “hate speech” policy for a while, giving the leftist political class a chance to catch up. By then his company will [have in place](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-5602287/Facebook-AI-tools-automatically-flag-remove-hate-speech-5-10-years-says-Zuckerberg.html) Artificial Intelligence (AI) “to automatically flag and remove hate speech before it appears.” This, Zuckerberg says, will be in place “within five to 10 years.”

But who will be in charge of defining what hate speech is? For that matter, who at Facebook is in charge of it now? Someone at the company, or a contractor, will have to originate the program the AI platform will run on. Or maybe they will let someone in Chuck Schumer’s office determine the parameters.

This is a dangerous game that is being played. As we on the right often say – it’s a slippery slope. And it’s been recognized as such for hundreds of years.

On March 15, 1783, George Washington [addressed](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-10840) the officers of his Army, stating:

“For if Men are to be precluded from offering their Sentiments on a matter, which may involve the most serious and alarming consequences, that can invite the consideration of Mankind, reason is of no use to us; the freedom of Speech may be taken away, and, dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep, to the Slaughter.”

And this was eight years prior to the ratification of Bill of Rights, containing the First Amendment.

Washington, as did most of the founders, understood the slippery slope of silencing disagreeable speech. They knew, as should we all, that, in fact, “hate,” or dissenting speech, should be the most protected speech. No one is going to have a problem or wish to limit speech that doesn’t potentially offend, so there is no need to “protect” it. It is naturally protected by reason of this lack of offense.

However, the progressive left have been attempting to muzzle dissenting opinion since the time of Woodrow Wilson, and actually long before.

In 1798, the first Sedition Act became law. Known as the [Alien and Sedition Acts,](https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/sedition-act-becomes-federal-law) it was rammed through Congress by Alexander Hamilton and congressional federalists, without even consulting President John Adams.

“The Sedition Act permitted the prosecution of individuals who voiced or printed what the government deemed to be malicious remarks about the president or government of the United States. Fourteen Republicans and mainly journalists were prosecuted, and some even imprisoned, under the act.”

Thanks to the efforts of Adams, Jefferson and Madison, Hamilton’s act was not long for this world.

But another [bite of the apple](https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/u-s-congress-passes-sedition-act) didn’t come until 1918 under the aforementioned President Wilson. [Wilson’s Sedition Act](http://commonconstitutionalist.com/political-stuff/an-american-dictator-part-deux/) “forbade American citizens from criticizing their government during a time of war. The American people could not, ‘utter, print, write or publish any disloyal, profane, scurrilous or abusive language’ regarding the government or the military.”

“In the Wilson police state, citizens were not even safe in their own homes if they spoke ill of the president. Federal attorneys and U.S. marshals publicly claimed that citizens had nothing to fear as long as they ‘Obeyed the law and kept their mouths shut.'”

As bad as we think Facebook’s behavior is, they have a long way to go to catch up to their radical predecessors.

So when we on the right speak, and are mocked for warning of slippery slopes, know now that we’re not just making it up. It’s happened twice before and will happen again if we’re not vigilant.

**How Facebook Targets You**

If you want to tailor a Facebook ad to a single user out of its universe of 2.2 billion, you could.

Trying to pitch your boutique bed and breakfast to a 44-year-old "trendy mom" who lives in Seattle, leans conservative and is currently traveling in the Toronto area but hasn't booked a hotel for the night yet? Go right ahead. Interested in mail-ordering pet treats to a 32-year-old cat owner in Madison, Wisconsin who enjoys Japanese food, doesn't like pizza and has an anniversary coming up in the next two months? Not a problem.

Targeting ads, it turns out, is almost infinitely customizable — sometimes in surprising ways. The ads you might see can be tailored to you down to the most granular details — not just where you live and what websites you visited recently, but whether you've gotten engaged in the past six months, are interested in organic food or share characteristics with people who have recently bought a BMW, even if you've never expressed interest in doing so yourself.

Facebook made $40 billion in advertising revenue last year, second only to Google when it comes to its share of the global digital advertising market. Even with a recent decision to stop working with outside data brokers to help advertisers target ads based on things like offline purchases or credit history, this number is expected to grow sharply this year.

Here are some ways advertisers can target you through Facebook:

— MONITORING YOUR FACEBOOK ACTIVITY

By now you've probably gathered that Facebook uses things like your interest, age and other demographic and geographic information to help advertisers reach you. Then there's the stuff your friends do and like — the idea being that it's a good indicator for what you might do and like. So, if you have a friend who has liked the New Yorker's Facebook page, you might see ads for the magazine on your Facebook feed.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg. Facebook and advertisers can also infer stuff about you based on things you share willingly. For example, Facebook categorizes users into an "ethnic affinity" based on what it thinks might be their ethnicity or ethnic influence. It might guess this through TV shows or music you've liked. Often, Facebook is wrong — and while it's possible to remove it, you can't change it. There is also no "ethnic affinity" option for whites.

While there are plenty of good reasons advertisers may want to target people of a particular ethnicity, this became a problem for Facebook in 2016, when ProPublica found that it let advertisers exclude specific ethnic groups from seeing their ads. When it comes to housing and employment ads, this is illegal.

In late 2017, Facebook said it was temporarily blocking advertisers' ability to target based on ethnic affinity, along with other things such as religious or LGBT affinity. Advertisers can still target those groups — just not exclude them. Facebook, which said it is conducting an audit of how the feature can be misused, did not say when it would lift the block.

While some advertisers want to reach large swaths of people, others like more specific targeting. As Facebook explains in a guide for advertisers, it's possible to refine an ad's audience on things like what people post on their timelines, apps they use, ads they click, demographics such as age, gender and location, and even the mobile device they use or their network connection. Based on this information, advertisers can either include or exclude categories such as homeowners, "trendy moms," people who moved recently, conservatives, or people interested in cooking, for example.

That said, Facebook warns advertisers not to narrow their audience too much by being overly specific, which can make the ads less effective — since fewer people will see them.

— FOLLOWING YOU OFF FACEBOOK

An ad offering called "custom audiences" lets advertisers target anyone who has already bought stuff from them or has visited their websites. They can also target anyone who has shared an email address or downloaded their app. So, if you use Netflix, you may see an ad on Facebook for a new TV show that might interest you. Or, if you gave your email address when you bought a pair of slippers from Land's End, you might get an ad for an upcoming slipper sale, since Facebook has your email address too.

Then there are "lookalike audiences." These are people who are similar to a business's existing customer base, but are not customers themselves. This can help advertisers reach people in different countries, for example. Advertisers can use this tool by first uploading their customers' data through the "custom audiences" feature. Then, Facebook's algorithms look for people similar to them. In addition, advertisers can also install a Facebook "pixel" on their site, a piece of code that tracks what people do off of Facebook.

— DYNAMIC ADS

A new type of ad Facebook launched recently, this lets businesses target people who have already shown interest in them. It uses "retargeting" — that sometimes-annoying way that a handbag you looked on a website can follow you around the internet regardless of whether you want to buy it. Dynamic ads, though, go a step further, and know if you were just browsing or if you put that handbag in your online shopping cart, and may nudge you with a 10 percent of coupon.

As Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg explained in a recent earnings call, dynamic ads let Holiday Inn target people who searched for hotels on its website but hadn't yet booked. The ads these Facebook users saw had a video personalized to the dates and places they searched for. The result: the hotel chain got three times the return on what it spent on these ads than on their previous ad campaigns, according to Sandberg.

**Drake Equation: Estimating the Odds of Finding E.T.**

By Elizabeth Howell, Space.com Contributor | April 5, 2018 10:06pm ET

Astronomers use the huge Arecibo Observatory, a radio telescope in Puerto Rico, to study the close flyby of Earth by asteroids.

The Drake Equation is used to estimate the number of communicating civilizations in the cosmos, or more simply put, the odds of finding intelligent life in the universe.

First proposed by radio astronomer Frank Drake in 1961, the equation calculates the number of communicating civilizations by multiplying several variables. It's usually written, according to the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI), as:

N = R\* • fp • ne • fl • fi • fc • L

N = The number of civilizations in the Milky Way galaxy whose electromagnetic emissions are detectable.

R\* = The rate of formation of stars suitable for the development of intelligent life.

fp = The fraction of those stars with planetary systems.

ne = The number of planets, per solar system, with an environment suitable for life.

fl = The fraction of suitable planets on which life actually appears.

fi = The fraction of life bearing planets on which intelligent life emerges.

fc = The fraction of civilizations that develop a technology that releases detectable signs of their existence into space.

L = The length of time such civilizations release detectable signals into space.

The challenge (at least for now) is that astronomers don't have firm numbers on any of those variables, so any calculation of the Drake Equation remains a rough estimate for now. There have been, however, discoveries in some of these fields that give astronomers a better chance of finding the answer.

The recent discoveries of rocky worlds near Proxima Centauri (a star of the Alpha Centauri system) and TRAPPIST-1 have increased the public's attention on the search for life. These stars, however, are red dwarfs that might be too volatile for life. More study is needed to understand where life might be possible, and whether it could persist long enough to communicate with other civilizations.

Exoplanet discoveries

Astronomers certainly could imagine the existence of other planets outside the solar system in 1961, but it took until 1995 until the first confirmed exoplanet was found around a main-sequence star Called 51 Pegasi b, the discovery ushered in a new era when astronomers were able to track down many other planets across the universe.

Traditionally, planets have been found through two methods: watching them transit across a star (which causes a dimming that can be measured from Earth) or examining the gravitational wobbles the planets induce as they orbit around their parent star. More recently, a technique called "verification by multiplicity" allows astronomers to quickly identify multiple-planet systems.

Estimating the total number of planets in the universe is difficult, but one statistical study suggests that in the Milky Way, each star has an average of 1.6 planets – yielding 160 billion alien planets in our home galaxy. (The study used a technique called gravitational lensing that observes changes in light curves when a relatively nearby star passes in front of more distant objects.) [Related: 13 Ways to Hunt Intelligent Aliens]

As of March 2018, more than 3,708 exoplanets have been confirmed. The vast bulk of them were due to an observatory called the Kepler Space Telescope, which scrutinized a single spot in the Cygnus constellation between 2009 and 2013 before switching to its K2 mission, which rotated between different locations in the sky. Plumbing the data, astronomers continue to make discoveries from the information.

Suitable for life?

While Jupiter-sized planets are easier to spot in telescopes due to their large size and effect on their parent star, emerging research from the Kepler Space Telescope suggests that rocky planets are extremely common. A slew of Kepler discoveries announced in February 2014, for example, mainly contained super-Earths, or planets that are slightly larger than Earth and are considered by many astronomers to be habitable under the right conditions. ("Habitability" is usually defined as the zone around a star in which a rocky planet can maintain liquid water on the surface.)

Among the planets discovered by all telescopes, however, only a tiny fraction of them are likely to have an environment suitable for life. Astronomers can't measure this metric for sure yet, but a few factors likely come into play, such as how close a planet is to its parent star and what its atmosphere contains.

As of March 2018, the Habitable Exoplanets Catalog has 53 planets that "optimistically" could be suitable for life, and among those, 13 that are more likely to be habitable. The project is a part of the Planetary Habitability Laboratory at the University of Puerto Rico at Arecibo.

"These are artistic representations of all the planets around other stars (exoplanets) with any potential to support surface life as we know it," the catalog states below an illustration of the planets. "All of them are larger than Earth and we are not certain about their composition and habitability yet. We only know that they seem to have the right size and orbit to support surface liquid water. ." [Related: 5 Bold Claims of Alien Life]

Finding life outside of Earth — even microbial life — would be an important step toward better understanding the Drake Equation. Astronomers in fact have not given up on finding life within our own solar system. There are several areas that could host habitable environments now, or did in the past, such as the planet Mars or Jupiter's moon Europa.

A next step would be determining how to send a message to extraterrestrials and whether they could receive or understand it. On a small scale, astronomers have beamed messages to the stars and in a few cases, put discs on board spacecraft (such as Voyager) for anyone in the neighborhood to read and potentially find Earth for further communications.

Red dwarf stars

The catalog of known exoplanets also contains a number of planets circling red dwarf stars, which are smaller and dimmer than our own sun. It was easier to spot a planet blocking the sun as it goes across its face, from Kepler's past vantage point. It also was easier to confirm if the planet was indeed a planet, since a planet orbiting a smaller star will exert a stronger tug visible in radial velocity measurements.

Since red dwarfs produce less energy than the sun, any rocky planets in the habitable zone must huddle closer to the star to get enough heat to maintain liquid water on the surface. Two discoveries in particular attracted a lot of public attention. In 2016, astronomers discovered a rocky planet orbiting Proxima Centauri, a member of the Alpha Centauri star system that is only four light-years from Earth. Then in 2017, seven Earth-sized rocky planets were confirmed around the star TRAPPIST-1, which is only 40 light-years from Earth. Some of those planets may be in the habitable zone.

Emerging research on red dwarf stars, however, suggests they may not be very friendly for life. In the example of Proxima Centauri b, the planet is so close to its star that scientists suggest it may be tidally locked. This means one side of the planet always faces the star, and the other side always faces space. One side of the planet would be very hot, and one side of the planet very cold, unless there are winds to distribute the heat around. These conditions are challenging for life.

Even red dwarf stars in general may be troublesome locations. They are more volatile than our sun, particularly when they are young. The stars can send out flares and also coronal mass ejections, which are charged particles. Over time, CMEs can slowly rip away an atmosphere by removing molecules from the top, according to 2017 studies led by the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland. Even if a star doesn't send out CMEs, there's a chance it will blast out X-ray radiation, which could kill any life on the surface.

Astronomers are carrying out studies of red dwarf stars to determine how dangerous they may be, but further studies of these systems may require future telescopes. Starting in 2018, NASA's TESS (Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite) will study closer and brighter stars than Kepler did, potentially generating dozens of potentially habitable planets. And the agency's James Webb Space Telescope will launch no earlier than 2020, with the ability to look at some planets' atmospheres in the infrared to learn more about their composition. Meanwhile, the European Extremely Large Telescope (E-ELT) is under construction in Chile, with first light expected in 2024.