

Censored Tehran Peace Conference and Media Disinformation

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If anyone needs additional proof of the tremendous censorial control wielded over corporate and alleged “independent” media regarding Western powers’ imperialist projects they need look no further than the thorough news blackout of the August 9 Tehran Consultative Conference on Syria.[1] As this censorship ensued, “progressive” news outlets continued their barrage of dubious and misleading information on the continuing turmoil within Syria.



The August 9 Tehran conference was sponsored by the Islamic Republic of Iran, attended by representatives from close to 30 nations, including Russia, China, India, Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Venezuela, Cuba, and the UN envoy to Tehran. Its express intent was to “strengthen all-out regional and international efforts to help Syrian people to find a way out of ongoing crisis and prepare a suitable ground for national dialogue in a peaceful atmosphere.”

Given the meeting’s suggestion of dialogue over force the conveners excluded the United States, Britain, France, Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Qatar—countries behind the program to destabilize Syria’s al-Assad’s regime.[2]

The discussion is anticipated to continue as a corollary to the Non-Aligned Movement meeting taking place in Iran in late August. Iran hopes the August 9 conference will be a genuine first step in a peace process between the Syrian regime and internal opposition groups.

Conference delegates emphasized a recognition of Syrians’ grievances while also expressing concern over how “the entry of known terrorist groups and sects into the Syrian conflict” threatens regional peace and security.[3]

White House spokesman Jay Carney dismissed the meeting. “There is vast evidence that demonstrates that Iran has been engaged in an effort to prop up Assad as he brutally murders his own people,” Carney asserted. In an interview on NBC television US ambassador to the UN Susan Rice similarly claimed how Iran was playing a “nefarious” role in the Syria conflict, and acting as leader of an “axis of resistance” that was “bad for the region.”[4]

At a stage when the terrorist campaign in Syria appears to be faltering, the conference has likely caught US diplomats off guard. “I think the US State Department is freaked out

because this is a huge defeat for Hillary Clinton,” political analyst Webster Tarpley stated on Iran’s PressTV. “What is Hillary Clinton’s diplomacy worth when 30 countries—including about half the world when you get down to it—can come together on a pro-Syrian, pro-independence platform?”[5]

Since the Tehran confab’s discourse was characterized with a spirit of national self-determination and clearly sought to contest NATO’s deceptive imperialist designs, one might expect the left-progressive news media and blogosphere especially to be abuzz with extensive coverage of the event. Such coverage or commentary has yet to emerge.

In fact, progressive media outlets continued what was arguably a campaign of disinformation that for some time has championed the Western-backed, mercenary-infused Free Syrian Army while ignoring its now thousands of murders and atrocities. For example, on August 12 *The Nation* ran a story by Democracy Now correspondent Sharif Abdul Kouddous,[6] the Egyptian-American reporter with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood [7] who received accolades in left media circles for his 2011 coverage of Tahrir Square.

In the first of a three-part series, Kouddous related his recent foray to the Syrian city of Zabadani, “one of the earliest towns to stage demonstrations against the regime of Bashar al-Assad, with residents taking to the streets two weeks after the uprising in Deraa on March 15, 2011.”

With vivid accounts of bloodshed perpetrated by the Syrian forces, Kouddous emphasizes to *Nation* readers how Zabadani’s steadfast revolution derives from the grassroots, thus differing from the one being waged by ruthless NATO-backed death squads throughout the rest of the country. “People that were unarmed at first decided to arm themselves,” one local activist tells Kouddous. “The regime made this happen.”

The readership is told how the village is “controlled by residents and fighters with the Free Syrian Army—which in Zabadani are made up almost entirely of local volunteers and defecting soldiers hailing from the area.”

In an August 14 Democracy Now interview highlighting the *Nation* piece, Amy Goodman asked Kouddous why he chose Zabadani to profile. “Well, I found a way into Syria,” Kouddous replied.

As we know, the Syrian government does not really allow journalists in on official visas, or very rarely does. And so, there was a way in through Lebanon to reach this town. I was hoping to reach Damascus, but the number of checkpoints around Damascus prevented that from happening.

In fact, Zabadani is well known as one of the very few “rebel holdouts” in Syria. As the BBC similarly reported in January, “Zabadani is the only town near Damascus seething with rebellion. It’s the only town where the president has ceded power.”[9]

Thus the city is an especially ideal backdrop for a piece promoting the now-familiar NATO propaganda line of the popular indigenous uprising repressed by the brutal Assad regime, even though the scenario appears to be far from common.

As recently as late July, France 24 reported a less triumphant situation for Zabadani’s FSA

forces, with the Syrian Army making significant inroads toward retaking the city. “Those who want to fight must come here!” an FSA commander boasts. “They [Syrian forces] are cowards and dogs – they just bark orders into their walky-talkies.’ Despite the bravado,” a France 24 correspondent observed, “Syrian forces have pushed the rebels back and many rebel-held areas are now under the army’s control.”

According to this account (and contrary to Kouddous’ romanticization of the FSA), “Even the hardiest,” of Zabadani’s inhabitants “can’t stand anymore fighting.” One woman told the French journalists “she would rather take her family into the countryside, while the rest of the Free Syrian Army defends the rest of the district.”[8]

Kouddous’ reportage contributes to the progressive media’s larger project of seemingly authenticating the mainstream news outlets’ simplistic, NATO-friendly “popular revolution” news frame of the overall Middle East destabilization process.

Yet nothing makes the intent to mislead audiences more apparent than this deceptive amalgam of stifling coverage of a potentially productive and meaningful peace conference, denying a real voice to the victims of Western-backed mercenaries and death squads, and paying calculated homage to the Zabadani rebellion. The familiar formula seeks to prop up a now-transparently doubtful storyline begun in January 2011.

Notes

[1] The news blackout is initially observed by Webster Tarpley. “Tehran Conference Belies US Syria Claims: Webster Tarpley,” Press TV, August 10, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=giTEnaAW2yY>

[2] Syria: NATO’s Next “Humanitarian” War? Online Interactive Book, ed. Michel Chossudovsky, 2012, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=29234>

[3] “Participants in Iran Conference on Syria Issue Final Statement,” FARS News Agency, August 9, 2012, <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9104253537>

[4], “US Raps Iran on Syria After Tehran Conference,” Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, August 10, 2012, <http://www1.bssnews.net/newsDetails.php?cat=3&id=271302&date=2012-08-10>

[5] “Tehran Conference Belies US Syria Claims: Webster Tarpley,” Press TV, See also, “Tarpley: 30 Nations Meet in Tehran for Alternative to Hillary Clinton’s Attack on Syria,” Voltaire Network, August 12, 2012, <http://www.voltairenet.org/Tarpley-30-Nations-Meet-in-Tehran>

[6] Sharif Abdel Kouddous, “On the Ground in Zabadani, a Syrian Town in Revolt,” *The Nation*, August 13, 2012, <http://www.thenation.com/article/169360/ground-zabadani-syrian-town-revolt>

[7] Reporting from Tahrir Square in early 2011, Kouddous remarked, “One man who is sure Mubarak’s time is up is my uncle Mohamed Abd El Qudoos. A leading opposition protester, Mohamed is the head of the Freedom Committee in the Press Syndicate, which has ties to

the Muslim Brotherhood.” Why does one of the progressive news program’s foremost correspondents have ties to and tout the fiercely reactionary Muslim Brotherhood? “Live From Egypt, The Rebellion Grows Stronger,” Democracy Now! January 30, 2011, http://www.democracynow.org/blog/2011/1/30/live_from_egypt_the_rebellion_grows_stronger_by_sharif_abdel_kouddous

[8] Jeremy Bowen, “Zabadani: The Town President Assad Does Not Control,” BBC, January 20, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-16663264>

[9] “Rebels and Assad’s Forces Face-Off in Zabadani,” France 24, July 28, 2012, <http://www.france24.com/en/20120728-syria-zabadani-free-syrian-army-rebels-bashar-al-assad-troops-mortars>

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James F. Tracy was a tenured Associate Professor of Journalism and Media Studies at Florida Atlantic University from 2002 to 2016. He was fired by FAU ostensibly for violating the university's policies imposed on the free speech rights of faculty. Tracy has filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against the university, with trial set to begin November 27, 2017. Tracy received his PhD from University of Iowa. His work on media history, politics and culture has appeared in a wide variety of academic journals, edited volumes, and alternative news and opinion outlets. Additional information is available at MemoryHoleBlog.com, TracyLegalDefense.org, and jamesftracy.wordpress.com.

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