

Debunking the Western Media's Coverage of the War on Syria

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In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

The most prestigious newspaper in Peru is no more than another mouthpiece for power. But this shouldn't surprise anyone familiar with mainstream media and its propagandistic role in our society.

Sadly, most people remain unaware of this reality and still approach this kind of media for understanding on the appalling problems of contemporary life. For them there are real news: you will find no such understanding in El Comercio.

DOMINGO 16 DE OCTUBRE DEL 2016 | 09:18

Alepo, la capital económica de Siria reducida a escombros

El epicentro de la guerra siria está sumido en la desolación y la destrucción. Miles huyeron, otros sufren los bombardeos

We will consider the Syrian conflict because it's an ongoing issue with massive coverage to analyze. The fact that mainstream media (MSM) in Peru, as elsewhere, import its articles from Big Media and their agencies around the world does not, of course, release them of the responsibility to verify everything they publish and therefore endorse.

Let's imagine ourselves taking half an hour of our busy lives to seek information in MSM regarding Syria, in order to learn what's been happening there for the last five years. What could be better than an article titled: "Seven questions to understand what is happening in Syria"? ([elcomercio.pe](#), 09/24/16).

The answer could easily be anything, because the supposed facts being paraded in this article imported from the BBC are misleading, fallacious or wrong. And any reader searching for truth or an honest interpretation based on facts regarding this conflict may find itself more confused or even worse, completely deceived about its nature. This analysis targets a narrative common to most Western MSM. Its Peruvian counterpart is particularly shallow and disaffected, and rarely redact their own articles on foreign conflicts, importing them, for an even more homogenized massive world coverage.

This sort of articles aimed at understanding something in a set of simple and clear steps are

getting more popular as more and more people seem to drift away from questioning and thinking, researching, or going into contemporary subjects with any kind of depth.

The first subtitle in the article reads: (all quotes from El Comercio in light blue)

“What started as a peaceful uprising against the Syrian president, turned into a bloody civil war”.

This is a statement of two of the most important points in the Western narrative regarding not only Syria, but many other past conflicts, as this article will argue.

So let’s proceed and debunk this set of lies repeated by the MSM ad-nauseam to advance the interests of empire.

1. “What was the situation in Syria before the war begun?”

2. “How did the war start?”



This two first questions need a wide and historic point of view that the MSM can’t entertain in its pages and television airwaves because of the simplified nature of its narrative and the limited space they devote to foreign conflicts. The only paragraph dedicated to the situation in Syria before the war (question 1) states:

“Years before the conflict started, many Syrians complained about the high unemployment rates in the country, extensive corruption, lack of political freedom and government repression by Assad...”

The article then jumps right into the events of 2011 that started the uprising. But where should we start if we want to assert the real reasons behind the conflict and its evolution through the last five years?

One of the best places to find political and economic information regarding most countries in the world are their respective US embassies, as the WikiLeaks files or authors as Phillip Agee have shown us in the past. This is especially true when the US have important interests at stake, as in the case of Syria, where in 2006 a private diplomatic email by chargé de affaires William Roebuck shows a clear intention by its officials regarding the regime and its ‘vulnerabilities’:

“We believe Bashar’s weaknesses are in how he chooses to react to looming

issues, both perceived and real, such as the conflict between economic reform steps (however limited) and entrenched, corrupt forces, the Kurdish question, and the potential threat to the regime from the increasing presence of transiting Islamist extremists. This cable summarizes our assessment of this vulnerabilities and suggests that there may be actions, statements, and signals that the USG can send that will improve the likelihood of such opportunities arising". (Emphasis added)

As Robert Naiman exposed (WikiLeaks Files):

"In public, the US was opposed to Islamist "extremists" everywhere; but in private it saw the "potential threat to the regime from the increasing presence of transiting Islamist extremist" as an "opportunity" that the US should take action to try to increase".

Along with other pieces of advice, Roebuck suggests "playing on Sunni fears of Iranian influence... thought often exaggerated", adding that both the "Egyptian and Saudi missions in Syria are giving increased attention to the matter and we should coordinate more closely with their governments on ways to better publicize and focus regional attention on the issue". Fanning sectarian tensions is an old one, especially within strategies unconcerned by its effects on civil societies.

But creating division among the Syrian population wasn't quite enough, as Roebuck also suggests to "Encourage rumors and signals of external plotting" aiming for the regime's "paranoia and increasing the possibility of a self-defeating over-reaction". As we can observe, there was no paranoia at all, but grounded concerns.

Other formerly classified documents also look back into the moments before the 2011 uprising, as this US Defense Intelligence Agency heavily redacted document obtained through a federal lawsuit, states:

"AQI (Al-Qaeda in Iraq) supported the Syrian opposition since the beginning, both ideologically and through the media. AQI declared its opposition to the Assad's government because it considered it sectarian regime targeting Sunnis".

This information haven't seen the light of MSM coverage, as it's radically opposed to the pro-Western rhetoric, as El Comercio/ BBC repeats:

"The incident (a group of boys allegedly arrested and tortured for graffiti paintings in Daraa) provoked pro-democratic protests, inspired on the Arab Spring... security forces opened fire on the protestors, killing several, which provoked more people into taking the streets. The uprising extended through the country asking for the resignation of Assad..."



Other less publicized testimonies, as that from Jesuit priest Frans Van der Lugt (left), killed by extremists in 2014 in Homs, suggest that the beginning of the conflict was not as simple as MSM states, but rather follow the logic expressed in the formerly classified cables:

"I have seen from the beginning armed protesters in those demonstrations ... they were the first to fire on the police. Very often the violence of the security forces comes in response to the brutal violence of the armed insurgents."

There were indeed anti-Assad protests, sometimes clashing with pro-Assad protests, but they were in many cases infiltrated or even promoted by elements with very different goals, mainly not Syrian in origin, and used for violence against civilians and peaceful protestors, policemen and soldiers.

"Many opposition sympathizers started to arm themselves, first as protection and later to expel government's forces". "(The conflict) soon acquired sectarian features... this dragged into the conflict other regional forces..."

Presumably the article refers to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey (among others). But as our research tells us, they were already involved in a more covert fashion before the uprising begun.

As Andrew Cockburn reported for Harper's magazine in January, 2016:

"Earlier in the Syrian war, US officials had at least maintained the pretense that weapons were being funneled only to so-called moderate opposition groups. But in 2014, in a speech at Harvard, Vice President Joe Biden confirmed that we were arming extremists once again, although he was careful to pin the blame on America's allies in the region, whom he denounced as 'our largest problem in Syria.' In response to a student's question, he volunteered that our allies

'...were so determined to take down Assad and essentially have a proxy Sunni-Shia war, what did they do? They poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens, thousands of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad. Except that the people who were being supplied were al-Nusra and Al Qaeda and the extremist elements of jihadis (sic) coming from other parts of the world'.

"Biden's explanation was entirely reminiscent of official excuses for the arming of fundamentalists in Afghanistan during the 1980s, which maintained that the Pakistanis had total control of the distribution of US-supplied weapons and that the CIA was incapable of intervening when most of those weapons ended up with the likes of G. Hekmatyar. Asked why the United States was supposedly

powerless to stop nations like Qatar, population 2.19 million, from pouring arms into the arsenals of Nusra and similar groups, a former adviser to one of the Gulf States replied softly: 'They didn't want to'".

Let's go forward into the third question without having exhausted our rather lengthy arguments regarding the nature of the 2011 uprising.

3. Who is fighting against who now?

The answer starts by stating that "the armed opposition has evolved since its beginnings". (From what?) The MSM narrative tries to make a clear, but false, separation between terrorists and armed opposition. In the analyzed article the former only arrived to Syria when the conflict was ongoing, to take advantage of the disputed territories and wage a war against the Shia/Alawite 'infidels' in power, and are also at war with the supposed "moderates".

Let's kill two birds with one stone on this one, by taking as an example the "moderate" rebels from Nour al-Din al-Zenki, one of the groups supported by the CIA, who beheaded a Palestinian boy last July for the cameras and took 'selfies' of themselves while doing it. A few months later another incident, this time covered (or produced) by the "Aleppo Media Center", shown the world a wounded child by the name of Omran (Aylan in other reports), who then became the poster boy for the Syrian conflict by means of media exposition.

The connection between these two apparently dissociated incidents goes by the name of Mahmoud Raslan, one of Omran's rescuers and photographer, seen in the video footage of the rescue outside the ambulance holding a camera with members of the White Helmets (civilian rescuers). This individual is also in pictures with the "moderate" beheaders of the Nour al-Din al-Zenki mentioned above, posing like friends on a weekend trip, blurring the already thin line between moderates, extremists and even the so-called non-partisan civilian rescuers (USAID-funded) White Helmets.

By the end of the 3rd answer we find another gem:

"And regardless of moderate rebels repeatedly asking Washington for anti-aircraft weaponry to respond to Russian and Syrian devastating attacks, the United States have declined the request, fearing the advanced weaponry could end up in jihadist's hands".

This is a particularly deceiving statement. While the US haven't, to my knowledge, provided anti-air weapons to the rebels, it has delivered all sorts of other weaponry to them, directly by the CIA, or indirectly through its allies in the region. A report by the Washington Post says the CIA was spending 1 billion USD a year in funding these groups, which also includes training and other services. Of course, these weapons are given to the so-called "moderates", but as we argue, and many testimonies by US officials prove, these arms end up in the wrong hands rather often, as another article by the New York Times notes two weeks later: "CIA Arms for Syrian Rebels Supplied Black Market, Officials Say". Are we supposed to believe this is some kind of mistake, as self-indulgent MSM analysts do?

Throughout the article there's no mention of who is arming the rebels. In the paragraphs

answering the 2nd question it misleadingly states that:

“...opposition sympathizers started to arm themselves...”

4. **How did foreign powers got involved?**

5. **Why is the conflict lasting so long?**

As we already mentioned, foreign powers, meaning the US and its allies, were already involved in many ways in a “regime change” scheme since as early as 2006. The answer for question number 4 mentions in one line that:

“The United States, on their part, insist on Assad being responsible for huge atrocities and must resign”.

And that’s the extent of the influence of the US in this conflict according to this wholesale MSM article written for the disoriented masses. But the whitewashing continue in favor of US regional allies:

“Saudi Arabia is another participant in this proxy war. To counter Iran’s influence, its main rival in the region, SA has sent considerable military and financial aid to the rebels, including those with Islamist Ideologies”. (Emphasis added)

Another misleading piece of information on the nature of the conflict reads:

“The divisions between the Sunni majority and the Alawite Shia, have provoked both sides to commit atrocities that have caused not only an enormous loss in lives but the destruction of communities, strengthen positions and reduce hope on a political solution”.

But the majority of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) is Sunni, and has included in the past a few Christian generals. As Kamal Alam writes for The National Interest’s blog:

“The fact remains: The moderate Syrian opposition only exists in fancy suits in Western hotel lobbies. It has little military backing on the ground. If you want to ask why Assad is still the president of Syria, the answer is not simply Russia or Iran, but the fact that his army remains resilient and pluralistic, representing a Syria in which religion alone does not determine who rises to the top”.

Deir-Ezzor, “an entirely Sunni city which has held out against ISIS encirclement for two years—and is commanded by the Druze General Issam Zahreddine”, as Alam continues, was attacked by the US Army, who targeted an SAA base killing 62 soldiers and wounding several more, in the first direct attack from the Pentagon on a Syrian Government facility or its forces. This incident happened on September 17th and ended the ceasefire, and not the alleged Russian attack on a UN aid convoy happened two days later.

In short, the “atrocities” cannot be blamed on sectarian allegiance, since it’s not what drives the main actors involved, although terrorists will often address to religious rhetoric.



A fact not mentioned by the mainstream media: Syria’s President’s wife **Asma al-Assad** (right) is Sunni.

Taking in consideration the secular character of the Syrian society and its government, all bets on sectarian originated violence should be on the rebel side, also known for establishing Sharia law courts in controlled territories.

6. What has been the impact of this war?

“The Syrian Observatory of Human Rights, a monitoring group based in London, indicates that up to September 2016, the number of deaths is 301,000”.

Estimates put the numbers between 250,000 and almost 500,000 victims and several millions displaced and surviving as refugees mainly in neighbor countries and Europe.

But the sources of this information are not without an allegiance either. We already talked about the White Helmets, working hand in glove with the not so “moderate” groups and factions mentioned above, only in rebel-held areas and many times as a sort of PR firm for the jihadists as well, which doesn’t mean they couldn’t at the same time rescue some people from the rubble.

Another, probably massive media’s favorite source of information regarding Syria, would be the above mentioned, ‘Syrian Observatory of Human Rights’, a one man operation located in a suburb in Coventry, England. Also known as Rami Abdulrahman, he is a declared member of the opposition: “I came to Britain the day Hafez al-Assad died, and I’ll return when Bashar al-Assad goes,” as he told Reuters on 2011. It was also revealed by the New York Times that the SOHR is funded by subsidies from the European Union and a certain European country he won’t disclose.

As Tony Cartalucci notes: “it is beyond doubt that it is the United Kingdom itself – as Abdul Rahman has direct access to the Foreign Secretary William Hague, who he has been documented meeting in person on multiple occasions at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London. The NYT in fact reveals that it was the British government that first relocated Abdul Rahman to Coventry, England after he fled Syria over a decade ago because of his anti-government activities...”

By any means the SOHR, the most widely cited source by MSM on Syria, is far from being an impartial one.

Beyond the visible death and destruction of Syrian society lies another untold consequence of this conflict: the fact that thousands of newly armed and trained jihadists will remain to roam around the Middle East and the rest of the world, regardless of the outcome of this war.

A conspiracy theorist would argue that another monster is being created deliberately by Western forces to further military expense, diminish civilian liberties and to excuse uncontested military presence virtually anywhere while fighting its own creation and its many tentacles.

7. What is the international community doing to put an end to the conflict?

Being this question answered above in some extension, we should refer to the diplomatic performance of the different powers struggling for whatever their particular goals are.



John Kerry and Samantha Power (left) have reduced themselves to advocates for terrorism by campaigning against Syria and Russia in their efforts to regain Eastern Aleppo from forces made up of 50% al-Nusra, the Syrian branch to al-Qaeda. Who are also said to dominate any other faction fighting on that side. “Rebel-held Aleppo” is a mainstream media fiction fostering support for terrorism among world public opinion.

We should remember at this point that when Aleppo was not under the spotlight of MSM as it has been in the last months, many news reports covered it as a city swarming with al-Nusra extremists and other al-Qaeda affiliates, as this April 2013 NYT article shows:

In Syria’s largest city, Aleppo, rebels aligned with Al Qaeda control the power plant, run the bakeries and head a court that applies Islamic law. Elsewhere, they have seized government oil fields, put employees back to work and now profit from the crude they produce.

Across Syria, rebel-held areas are dotted with Islamic courts staffed by lawyers and clerics, and by fighting brigades led by extremists. Even the Supreme Military Council, the umbrella rebel organization whose formation the West had hoped would sideline radical groups, is stocked with commanders who want to infuse Islamic law into a future Syrian government.

Nowhere in rebel-controlled Syria is there a secular fighting force to speak of.

Another talking point recently integrated into the discourse is found in the last paragraphs:

“The last partial ceasefire, in mid-September, failed a few days after entering into force when a humanitarian convoy was lethally attacked.”

Although Russia has denied the charges, it's being treated by the MSM as the obvious culprit. As we already mentioned, the attack on Deir-Ezzor happened two days earlier and the US immediately took responsibility for the “mistake”.

While honest journalism would denounce the audacity of a government whose officials advocate for human rights and point fingers at Russia for alleged war crimes while at the same time supporting terrorism as a manner of proxy army against Syria, MSM instead acts as a sort of PR asset for power. It's not surprising to find out very recent cases when high ranking diplomats and politicians are caught lying to the public, even about supposed war crimes, to be then whitewashed by media giants as the New York Times or the BBC. This is the kind of journalism available for most people in the world.

Samantha Power also leaves out the bombing on Yemen by its Middle East ‘partner in crime’ Saudi Arabia, with more than a billion in arms sold to them in 2015 by the US, as well as Intelligence and aerial refueling for its jets, which to some accounts (The Yemen Data Project) hit as many civilian targets as military. The UN puts the death toll of the 18-month war at more than 10,000.

Between 2009 and 2015 the US and the Saudis have signed deals for (potentially) 100 billion dollars.

While opinion pieces in MSM tend to offer a deeper, and sometimes even more truthful look into international conflicts, the facts covered only make it into the official narrative if they contribute to the ideas listed below, otherwise they are buried under whatever narrative is repeated non-stop as the truth.

A closer look into MSM coverage on Syria expose some of the specific messages that compose the “civil war/ peaceful protestor” narrative (as mentioned in the first subtitle of the analyzed article) aligned with US interests, many of them are easy to find in this wholesale dumbed-down piece of journalism by the BBC / El Comercio, and have been exposed by independent journalism on a daily basis for the last years:

- The uprising was purely civilian, terrorists groups entered the ongoing conflict later, taking advantage of the situation.
- The regime started the conflict by using violence against peaceful protestors, who then started “arming themselves” to fight back.
- The US got involved in Syria in response to alleged chemical attacks by Assad's forces (2013).

- The US and allies fund, arm and train rebel “moderates” only.
- Religious sectarianism drives both pro-Assad and anti-Assad forces in what seems to be a Sunni vs Shia/ Opposition vs Government “civil war”, and not a fight to get rid of and international coalition of terrorist factions decimating a secular society.
- With complete disregard for international law and its institutions, the “criminal regime” must be toppled by an international coalition in its “Responsibility to Protect” civilians.
- Rebels and terrorists are visibly separated and sometimes fighting against each other.

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Notes:

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