

From Far Away: Syria central to the 18th World Festival of Youth and Students in Ecuador

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This short documentary features a number of individuals who have participated in a conference on Syria and the Middle East in Ecuador while the 18th World Festival of Youth and Students was also taking place in Ecuador. The director took the opportunity to talk about the crisis in Syria with participants from both events being held in Ecuador.

TRANSCRIPT

Narration: Ecuador is a country in South America, covered with tropical trees and full of many volcanoes. Its official name, Republica del Ecuador, means the republic of the equator, which is an imaginary line drawn around the middle of the Earth to divide it into two hemispheres. If you stand on it, one side of you is the North and the other is the South.

The inhabitants of this land started their first uprising against Spanish colonialism, when Spain was a superpower and possessed the strongest warships in the world, in order to achieve an original concept called freedom which is not imaginary or does not know directions like the north or the south.

Currently, Ecuador is in peace. It is a bounteous land, which has rain at night and sunlight at day, with happy and loveable people.

In the last days of fall, which does not mean much in the moderate climate of Ecuador, the capital city of Quito hosted the 18th World Festival of Youth and Students. It is ceremony which is held every three or four years in anti-imperialist or anti-capitalist countries. The youths and students from over a hundred countries take part in this festival. The thousands of youths in the festival are from various cultures, races, and languages but they have, of course, one thing in common. They are all anti-imperialists.

Narrator: In their opinion, imperialism is an economic, political, and military system which intends to seize all world resources and gain the most benefits at any cost. They know America as the symbol of this system. And now, Ecuador, which has been under the yoke of America, is hosting more than ten thousand anti-American [anti-imperialist] youths.

I went to Ecuador to participate in the festival and make a program about it. On the first day of the festival, a flag grabbed my attention. The flag of Syria! Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, a major part of my professional activities has been about Syria. I travelled to

Syria several times and played a role in many events there. I had had many interviews with prominent figures. Syrian issues were interesting to me. However, there, on the other corner of the world, I was surprised when I saw the Syrian flag.

Syrian activist: We are here to say to the whole world that Syria will stand in front against the imperialist attack and the Zionist attack against Syria.

Narrator: Ecuador is one of the farthest inlands to Syria. Syrian and Ecuadorian people do not have any common cultural or religious background, or they even don't have any trade with each other. However, the Syrian groups have been welcomed warmly. All participants took photographs with them and gave good wishes for them. That is why I went among the participants to know more, and this time, to film Syria from the viewpoint of the people on this side of the world.

VOXPOP [English]: "Where are you from?"

Russian activist: Russia.

VOXPOP [English]: Can you speak English?

Russian activist: Yes

VOXPOP [English]: What is your idea about Syria?

Russian activist: Syria is our friend, we want that our government of our country help to your country [Syria] because we feel that we are brothers, we want peace on your country and we want good relationship between good countries."

Third Activist: Based on the bad conflict in Syria, I think it is a very hard strategic by Zionism, by United States, by imperialism. And they are trying to destabilize and they are trying to stop the sovereignty of Syria, the president Bashar Al-Assad because they don't like Bashar Al-Assad. Why? Because he is not a puppet. He is not a friend of Israel, he is not a friend of United States."

Fourth Activist: I believe that the Syrian people have the right to defend themselves for many any invading force, terrorist force. Obviously we know the fact that that the US is aiding terrorist extremist.

Third Activist: What they trying to do there is getting terrorist people from Qatar, from Saudi Arabia, from Turkey, Al-Qaeda. I mean I can't understand why United States are fighting against Al-Qaeda but now they are giving them the guns to come to Syria to fight for freedom. Oh my God, [it is] incredible!

Fifth Activist: Al-Qaeda for example is considered by the United States as a terrorist group, but it is kind of funny I could say or kind of contradictory that the United States joins a terrorist group qualified by the same United State as a terrorist group — that is Al-Qaeda, right? — to fight against a legitimate government in Syria.

Third Activist: I think that it is conflict that they are doing to stop Bashar Al-Assad. They don't like that Bashar Al-Assad is not a puppet. He is fighting against Zionism. He helps our brothers in Palestine. He helps our brothers in Lebanon. He is a good man I think and they are trying to stop that regime to get a puppet government like every country that they have

invaded in the world.

Second Russian Activist: So I am not really well known in international relations, [but] of course when like some other government support the people who killed somebody and eat their inner things, so it is for us, for Russian people and I think for any human being is not understandable thing.

Narration: A conference on Middle East was held on the sideline of the festival by the Institute of [Advanced] Studies affiliated to Ecuador's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I seized the opportunity and talk with some prominent figures about international issues in order to ask them about Syria.

SOUNDBITE [English], Norman Finkelstein: My name is Norman Finkelstein and I am a writer and lecturer.

SOUNDBITE [English], Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya: My name is Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya I am a sociologist from Canada.

SOUNDBITE [English], Nagham Salman: My name is Nagham Salman and I am originally from Syria.

SOUNDBITE [Arabic], Conversation between a prisoner in hand of Al-Qaeda and his Dad:

Syrian Son: Dad ... they are slaughtering me now ... you and Mom! Forgive me.

Syrian Dad: May God forgive you! In this world and hereafter ...

Syrian Son: Dad! Dad! Don't wait for me anymore. They are slaughtering me now ... they have just taken me here, to this slaughterhouse ...

Syrian Dad: Don't be afraid, my son! God is with you...

Syrian Son: Dad ... Dad ...

SOUNDBITE [English], Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya: No its not a revolution. Anybody who thinks that it is a revolution right now in the year 2013 is deluded and lying to themselves. That is not a revolution, killing innocent people, destroying market places...

SOUNDBITE [English], Norman Finkelstein: ...and so the aspect of a civil war was much smaller and the proxy war was the much bigger picture...

SOUNDBITE [English], Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya: First of all a lot of these revolutionaries supposedly — so-called revolutionaries — that are doing this [revolution] in the name of Islam, I don't think that they have read the Quran or know anything about the Quran. For starters it says that Muslims are not supposed to have alliances of non-Muslims where the Muslims — it is very specific from Quran, they [Muslims] cannot have an alliance with non-Muslims, if they [Muslims] are subordinate. These guys are subordinate to non-Muslims against Syria. Is this the revolution where people are being paid to fight for foreign interest [against Syria]?

SOUNDBITE [Arabic], Terrorists in Syria speaking.

SOUNDBITE [English], Nagham Salman: Syria as I said has a very important geo-political situation in the Middle East because of the geographical location, because of the political culture of the government or the regime, because of its strong alliance with Iran and Russia.

Narrator: Human rights, democracy, and the right to determine your destiny, from the viewpoint of European officials, are important somewhere, like Syria, and are unimportant somewhere, like Bahrain. They are repetitive terms. I asked experts about the real motives of the West and why Syria has become so important for them.

SOUNDBITE [English], Nagham Salman: Besides that this government supports a lot the resistance in Lebanon and in Palestine, it is the only Arabic government that fights for the Palestinian case until now. So this does not suit United States of America, not even Israel, and some other countries.

SOUNDBITE [English], Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya: Reform in Syria does and democracy in Syria does not mean reform and democracy for the Americans, it means bow down to us [the United States] and listen to us for your foreign policies and cut the Iranians out.

SOUNDBITE [English], Nagham Salman: The role of [the] United States and Israel is to get rid of the only enemy in the Arab governments, the only presidents that says “no” to the United States in the region.

...well, Syria has different situation from the other [Arab] countries. I think that years ago something was getting prepared for Syria years ago...

SOUNDBITE [English], Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya: ...of course regime change! The story of regime change starts in 1991, it starts with the Iraq War [Persian Gulf War]. Mr. [Paul] Wolfowitz, when he was undersecretary of defense, said now that the Soviets have collapsed look at what we are doing in Afghanistan, it's time to war out against the rest of the Middle East. This was a neo-con project which was endorsed by the Likudniks in Israel. The Israelis are very much tide to this. [They] had a long term plan of regime change throughout the entire Greater Middle East, from North Africa to Central Asia, and it just took some time to kick the war machine, to put it into play.

...in 2001, I know you know a hundred percent that General Clark mentioned a list [of countries that would be attacked] ... the war in Lebanon in 2006 was really against Syria, it was a demonstration. It was obviously at the end against Iran, but it was against Syria. Even [US Vice-President] Dick Cheney's Middle East advisor, his wife, who helped write the document *A Clean Break* [about destroying Syria for Israel], admits that Syria was the main target of the [2006] war. The French general who was in charge of UNIFIL [for the UN in Lebanon] in his book that he printed after he retired said that the Americans were going to send the Marines into Lebanon, they were planning on fighting Hezbollah and then going into Syria. They just wanted to make sure that Iran would not get involved. They don't want to fight [the entire Axis of Resistance] at the same time, they want to fight one [member at a time] and then go after the other ones.

SOUNDBITE [English], Nagham Salman: ...And I think they had the idea that if they can get rid of this government [in Syria], then they can attack Iran so Iran will not have this big alliance with Syria and in this case Hezbollah will stand alone in Lebanon and it will be easy for Israel to attack Hezbollah.

SOUNDBITE [English], Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya: You know these groups, who are they? You know some of them come from Iraq, they were part of the Awakening Councils. Who were the Awakening Councils? They were groups the Americans started paying basically to be under American control. That is even [acknowledged] in the American media about the Awakening Councils. They were paying them basically to fight for them [the US] in Iraq, and now these guys have become the seeds of what we are seeing in Syria.

...and of course Saudi Arabia had a big hand to play in this and Prince Bandar Bush, who has been pivotal with creating the Taliban, and who was pivotal in creating creating Fatal Al-Islam in Lebanon. Remember after the Israelis lost the war in Lebanon [in 2006], that all of a sudden these groups the are the seeds of what we are seeing in Syria starting coming to Lebanon. They [the US] wanted to use them against Hezbollah and eventually these are the same groups we have seen them using in Syria.

SOUNDBITE [English], Nagham Salman: It is also economic because Syria has petrol, has gas, and this is something very attractive for investment and I think Qatar has future from projects in Syria and that is why they pushed a lot the rebels to destroy more and more in Syria so they can be able to into the market and invest...

Narration: At the heart of South America, at the foothills of Ecuador's volcanic mountains, and in the middle of rain forests, talking about the Middle East had a strange feeling. It was like looking at a chess board from far away, whose pawns were alive, and whose rooks were real. They talked about Damascus, which is the oldest capital in the world. It has been known as "the Eastern Gate" for two thousand years.

SOUNDBITE [English], Norman Finkelstein: The United States has only one interest and that is Iran. They want to weaken Iran and that is their interest in Syria. Remember the United States got along quite well with Syria. Syria join the coalition in 1991 to force Iraq to leave Kuwait, they quite along well. Someone was just reminding me in the car today that when Hafez Al-Assad passed away, the United States sent a very large delegation. It was headed by [US Secretary of State] Madeline Albright. It has nothing to do with Syria, it's Iran. They want to weaken Iran.

SOUNDBITE [English], Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya: ... to cut the Iranians out. The road to Damascus is through Beirut, but Damascus is the road to Tehran.

SOUNDBITE [English], Norman Finkelstein: In a civil war each side has a finite amount of resources. So at a certain point, when each side realizes that it can't win, they decide on some political compromise. The problem now is that it is no longer a civil war [in Syria], it's a proxy war [in Syria] and each of the great powers has unlimited resources. They can go on and on and on and on because they have so much power, so much wealth. Will the Saudis stop? No, they will not stop. Will the Americans stop? No. It's the Syrian people who are paying a terrible, terrible, terrible price.

SOUNDBITE [English], Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya: ...they lost. The Americans lost in Syria. They lost the war. They know it. Everyone should know it by now.

There are some stubborn people in Saudi Arabia who are afraid that regime change will happen in Riyadh. They saw that the New York Times in September [2013] published that article saying Saudi Arabia is going to be broken up into several little states. They see the writing on the wall. Saudi Arabia is just a book note, it is a little footnote in a book. It is not

an important player. The real players are countries like Iran, China, Russia. These are the ones that matter. Saudi Arabia, it's time is done. The House of Saud is a fossil. They [the House of Saud] think that if we leave things in Syria that eventually it [our end] will come our way and, of course, the Americans don't mind them continuing to make Syria bleed and the Israelis don't mind either. They want a weak Syria. It benefits them to have weak countries in the region.

Narration: Our short days at Ecuador finished, but the war in Syria still continues. The war which has become part of Syrian people's everyday life... the war, with which Syrian children sleep at dusk, and wake up in the morning... the war in which all world powers are involved and all good and evil are confronting one another... and the war which may alter the world's destiny and change its order.

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An award-winning author and geopolitical analyst, Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya is the author of *The Globalization of NATO* (Clarity Press) and a forthcoming book *The War on Libya and the Re-Colonization of Africa*. He has also contributed to several other books ranging from cultural critique to international relations. He is a Sociologist and Research Associate at the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG), a contributor at the Strategic Culture Foundation (SCF), Moscow, and a member of the Scientific Committee of Geopolitica, Italy.

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