

Killing the Truth: A tribute to Veteran War Correspondent Maya Nasser assassinated by Syria Terrorists

By [Global Research News](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

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By Hala Jaber

The story below is written by my dear friend and veteran journalist for the Sunday Times, Hala Jaber.

It is a tribute to her friend and colleague, the martyr Maya Nasser, who was assassinated by NATO/GCC-funded terrorist "rebels" after receiving numerous death threats.

The piece was originally published in the Sunday Times [here](#) but is protected by a firewall. I copy-pasted the piece in full from Hala's Facebook wall. The piece in full below:

Oh Maya, I wish I'd taken your last call

Our reporter fled to safety when rebels mounted a huge attack on the defence ministry. Her fellow journalist was shot dead

Hala Jaber, Damascus Published: 30 September 2012

I WAS woken by an enormous explosion. The first thing I saw was a flash. The bomb sounded so close that I thought my hotel was under attack.

Heart racing, I peered out of the window of my fourth-floor room, only to see jabbering security staff pointing at the Ministry of Defence building opposite.

Black smoke was billowing into the sky from the General Staff Command, where the minister of defence has his office. It should have been one of the safest places in Syria, but as I dressed hurriedly with shaking hands, the rat-tat-tat of random machinegun fire suggested it was in chaos.

It was 7.01am on Wednesday — 5.01am in London, too early to call the office, so I tweeted: "Huge explosion now followed by sound of gunfire and siren of ambulances."

At 7.09am, another explosion shook the hotel. I dashed out of my room and opened the door to a terrace, where I stood alone, feeling strangely isolated. I tweeted what I saw, as much out of a need to feel connected to the world as a wish to impart the news.

The hotel's security staff warned me to go back inside. "There are snipers everywhere," they said, pointing to a gunman on top of the state television building to my right.

As I sat in the corridor, catching my breath, a series of smaller blasts reverberated around the square in front of the hotel. Ammunition was exploding as fire engulfed the upper floors. Through the smoke, I could see several men on the ministry building's roof, waving desperately in the hope of attracting rescuers.

At 6am London time, I briefed my foreign editor and joined a group of security guards on the terrace. The guards warned me to stay close to the wall for shelter, but even from there it was possible to see flashes of gunfire from inside rooms on the third and fourth floors of the ministry building.

As word spread that this was a serious rebel attack at the heart of the Damascus defence establishment, requests came in for broadcast interviews. At a little before 8am, I was speaking to the BBC on my British phone when I noticed a call coming in on my local mobile. It was Maya Naser, a Syrian television journalist I had met on an assignment in the country's second city, Aleppo. For nearly two weeks, we had met for breakfast or an evening coffee, sharing tips about the safest way round the city and debating the course of the war. In Damascus the previous week, we had caught up over dinner.

I'll call him back, I thought with a smile; he was probably ringing to say he was on the spot and perhaps to suggest I join him.

When the interview was over, I couldn't get through to Naser. I shrugged: he was almost certainly on air. But at 9.50am, when I was scanning Twitter for the latest reports, I saw a tweet that made my blood freeze. "Press TV correspondent Maya Naser killed by sniper in Syria," it said.

It took me several seconds to comprehend it. Then I thought there must have been a mistake and tweeted back: "He just called me like an hour ago. I couldn't take his call, was on other line, engaged when I tried him. Plz God NO."

I dialled his number again but it was still engaged. "Maya, pick up," I muttered, before dissolving into tears.

I thought of Marie Colvin, my friend and Sunday Times colleague who was killed by shellfire in Homs in February. I had spent nearly two weeks in Damascus trying to arrange for her body to be recovered, and finally identified her in a hospital morgue.

I thought of the 17 other journalists who have died covering the conflict in Syria this year.

But my over-riding thoughts last Wednesday were for Naser, for the parents he had just moved out of Homs to a safer place — and for the young woman he had fallen in love with. They had been going to announce their engagement two days later.

Maya Naser was born 33 years ago and raised by a Christian mother and a Muslim father so avowedly progressive that he gave his three sons girls' names to show there should be no difference between the opportunities for women and men.

Naser, a self-proclaimed liberal, disliked the regimes of President Hafez al-Assad and Bashar, the son who succeeded him in 2000. He was imprisoned as a dissident.

On his release, he felt he had little choice but to go into exile. He travelled to America and France, was married to a western woman and divorced.

After spells in Bahrain and Lebanon, he returned to Syria at the start of the uprising against the Assad government 18 months ago, and joined protesters thronging the streets.

This Arab spring revolution seemed to be about democratic reform at first. But Naser grew uneasy when the street demonstrations were punctuated by armed attacks on Syrian forces.

When it emerged that the rebels were being supported by foreign governments, notably those of Qatar and Saudi Arabia, his doubts were amplified. The arrival of Islamist militants from abroad to wage jihad on the Damascus government convinced him that his beloved Syria faced disintegration. He switched sides.

Three months ago Naser became a reporter with Press TV, an Iranian-owned station loathed by the rebels for its pro-government position.

Death threats began soon afterwards. One caller woke him regularly at 2am to warn that he would "kill you, rip you apart and teach you a lesson".

Good humour sustained him. When the caller rang after missing two nights in a row, Naser told him: "I've missed you and was worried about you. I hope you're well."

I first met him in August at a small hotel in Aleppo, where we were covering the rebels' efforts to seize the city and a government counter-offensive to repel them.

He came to my table at breakfast with a wide smile. "I'm Maya," he said, his blue eyes twinkling as he stretched out his hand. "We met on Twitter. Now it's personal."

I warmed to him over coffee and cigarettes. After that, we talked every day. He went to the front line with Assad's army and told me what he saw when my office instructed me to stay away from the fighting. I told him about the gossip at dinners he missed because his office made him stay in the hotel after dark. He ran terrible risks for front-line reportage. One night, he and his bureau chief, Hussein Murtada, 40, were trapped under fire for three hours during a failed rebel attempt to take the city's television station.

His mother worried about him, he admitted. He joked that she tried to tempt him home by saying she was cooking his favourite stew of chicken, garlic and rice.

At home in the city of Homs, Naser tried to mediate between warring factions, seeking out the Salafist commanders he resented for trying to turn the struggle for democracy into a holy war. He took three of them to Damascus, in the hope that its ancient history would inspire them to pursue peace.

According to Naser, the Salafists thanked him over dinner and said they respected his actions but that he would be killed for opposing them.

Shocked, he gestured to a table where two women of different religious beliefs were dining together, one with a veil, the other without. "This is what Syria is about and as long as I am alive, I will fight to keep it this way," he said.

Although his employer supported the government, Naser's heart ached over the casualties inflicted on civilians by both sides. Blogging from his room in the middle of Damascus about the army shelling of a suburb, he wrote: "Is this real? Is this fire I can barely see someone's house burning, or maybe a neighbourhood store? Is this my country on fire?"

He was almost killed in Damascus three weeks ago when his car was ambushed. Murtada, who was beside him, was hit in both legs by shrapnel that left him with a limp.

Naser put a brave face on the incident when we dined in the Christian quarter of the old city last week. But he believed Syria was descending into a war of attrition. "There will be no winner," he said. "Syria will have lost after this."

We had been due to meet last Wednesday morning. Instead, a white van drove into a checkpoint at the entrance to the Ministry of Defence building and blew up in a ball of fire.

In the confusion that followed, a black Mercedes reached the compound, disgorging rebels dressed in military police uniforms who shot three guards on the steps of General Staff Command and detonated the second bomb in their car. They joined forces with other rebels, who stormed the upper floors and put snipers in position to defend them.

Naser was again accompanied by Murtada as they raced to the scene on Umayyad Square. They entered the compound but retreated as the gunfire intensified, hunkering down in the street behind a barricade.

Surrounded by fire engines and soldiers, Naser felt safe enough to broadcast without a flak jacket or helmet. The studio anchor came on the line and he started to answer her first question. "The damage is huge on Umayyad Square," he said breathlessly. "No further news about the victims yet."

"Has the situation calmed down yet? Is it still taking place?" the studio presenter asked. The line went dead with a "beep, beep, beep". "Okay, we've lost Maya but we're going to try and definitely get him back on the line," she said.

Yesterday, in hospital, Murtada described what had happened. The first of the sniper's bullets had hit him, he said. "I felt myself going in circles, then I dropped to the ground. Within seconds, two others followed — whizz, whizz, tick, tick. These two bullets hit Maya in the neck and he dropped to the ground, smiling at me. He just had this smile on his face," Murtada said, his voice choking. He was shot in the hip but will survive.

Murtada has no doubt that the two journalists were targeted by a rebel who regarded them as a greater prize than the soldiers around them.

In the ambulance, there was a phonecall for Murtada, who, like Naser, had received death threats. It was one of the men who had been promising to shoot him. "We saw you enter the building," the man said. "You were limping. We were watching you."

Officials said last night that Naser had been one of three civilians who died in an attack that killed eight members of the security forces. Thirty rebels had died. A captured sniper had said the rebels planned to seize the prime minister's office and broadcast a decree from state television, but had been beaten back.

Murtada was to be reunited with his wife and two young sons this weekend. Naser's fiancée was photographed kneeling before his coffin.

His shooting bore out his view that the conflict would claim many innocent lives, including those of more journalists. "Bombs and bullets aren't smart enough to distinguish the right from the wrong," he wrote. "Bottom line is: my people are dying and I am still in the line,

waiting my turn.”

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