

Lies and Media Manipulations regarding the Protest Movement in Syria

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Global Research Editor's Note

The following article focusses on the Protest movement in Syria in mid-July. it does not cover recent events. It nonetheless suggests that mainstream media sources are systematically manipulating the relevant numbers

'The Hama Affair' or how 10,000 protestors multiply overnight to be 500,000 in the AFP's news reports

Hama - 500,000 protestors (AFP news reports) [1]



© photo Pierre PICCININ- HAMA (July 15th, 2011)

This July, I travelled to Syria, with the purpose of establishing an understanding of the causes of the political protest movement.

I was able to travel freely throughout the country, from Daraa, Damascus, Homs, Hama, Mara'at-an-Numan, Jisr-al-Shigur, on the Turkish border, even Deir- ez-Sor, all places where the media had signalled outbursts of violence...

I was able to witness the different internal struggles, some which were violent and had completely different objectives to the peaceful protest movement. The Muslim Brotherhood, for example, seeks to bring about an Islamic republic, which in turn terrifies both the Christians and Muslims.

Yet, outside the scope of my research, I was surprised that the image of Syria, portrayed by the Western media, a country undergoing full scale revolution, did not correspond whatsoever to the reality of the situation.



© photo Pierre PICCININ- HAMA (July 15th, 2011)

Indeed, the large-scale protest movements seem to have run out of steam, many of the protests only number a few hundred at most, usually focussed around mosques, bearing the mark of Islamist influence.

Therefore, it is only in the city of Hama, cultural stronghold of the Muslim brotherhood, under a state of siege, that full scale protests are to be found.

Centre of a violent revolt, in 1982, which was crushed by Hafez al-Assad, father of the incumbent President, Hama is today surrounded by heavy armour. This said, the government have chosen against a bloodbath, for fear of repercussions from the international community.

On Friday 15th July, I entered Hama. Very quickly I found myself surrounded by the youths in control. Upon presenting my Belgian passport the situation calmed down: 'Belgicaa! Belgicaa!'; as the only foreign observer on the ground, they escorted me through the protestors. The highlight of which was reaching the top of a skyscraper, from which I took a series of snaps, revealing the extent of the debacle.

On Asidi square, to the bottom of the large El-Alamein Avenue, prayer finished, to the sound of thousands of people appearing from all across the city, uniting under a shout of defiance 'Allah Akbar!'

That same night on 15th July, I received news feeds from the AFP announcing a million protestors all over Syria, of which 500,000 in Hama alone.

In Hama however, they could not have been more than 10,000.

Hama and Deir ez-Zor - 1,200,000 protestors (Le Monde) [2]

This 'information' was even more absurd due to the fact that the city of Hama counts 600,000 inhabitants.

Of course, there will always be a margin for error and numbers do vary with sources, estimations are never quite so straightforward.

Yet, in this case, it was not a simple estimation: this was blatant disinformation, propaganda at its finest. 500,000 protestors can shake the very foundations of a regime, 10,000 however are of lesser consequence.

Furthermore, all the 'information' regarding the Syrian situation has been twisted similarly for months now.

So what sources does the AFP cite?

The same which crop up systematically throughout the media and has now become a monopoly in its own right, regarding the Syrian protests: the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR).

Behind this superficial veneer of respectability and professionalism, hides a political organisation based in London, its president none other than Rami Abdel Raman, a man who has consistently sided against the Baath regime, who is loosely linked to the Muslim brotherhood.

Therefore, for a numerous months now, the Western media have diffused an edited reality, corrected by a unique source of which nobody has deemed it necessary, it seems, to question.

This portrayal of a Syria in full scale revolution and of a Baath party on the brink do not correspond in any way whatsoever to the reality of the situation; that the government hold control and what is left of the protests have in effect splintered and become considerably marginalised.

However, the consequences of this latest case of disinformation regarding Syria are far and outreaching: the lessons of Timisoara, the Gulf War or events in Yugoslavia haven't been learned. Still, European media continue to be lured into basing reports on loosely assembled news feeds and risk depicting a virtual reality for their readers/viewers.

Yet, when the media fail their duty of assembling genuine information, it is democracy itself which is in danger.

This article was originally published on our French language website www.mondialisation.ca

Notes

[1] Syrie : un million de manifestants contre le régime, 28 morts (Agence France-Presse, 15 juillet 2011).

[2] Syrie : 1,2 million de manifestants à Hama et Deir Ezzor, Le Monde, 22 juillet 2011.

Useful link(s) : Centre de Recherche sur la Mondialisation - Le Grand Soir - Tercera Información.

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