

“Socialists” Supporting NATO and U.S. Empire, Endorse “Moderate” Terrorists in Syria

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Global Research, September 06, 2016

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)
Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [US NATO](#)
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At the recent annual convention of Veterans for Peace, VFP Vice President Jerry Condon said “The US peace movement has been demobilized by disinformation on Syria.”

Disinformation and propaganda on Syria takes three distinct forms.

The first is the demonization of the Syrian leadership.

The second is the romanticization of the opposition.

The third form involves attacking anyone questioning the preceding characterizations.

There is a recent article which exemplifies all three of these forms. It is titled [“Anti-Imperialism and the Syrian Revolution”](#) by Ashley Smith of the International Socialist Organization (ISO). It’s a remarkable piece of misinformation and faulty analysis. Because it is clear and well written, it is likely to mislead people who are not well informed on the facts regarding Syria. Hence the importance of critically reviewing it.

Technique 1: Demonize the enemy ... “the Syrian regime and its brutal dictator”

Smith starts off posing the question: Are you with the Syrian revolution or the brutal Assad dictatorship? The way he frames it, it’s not a difficult choice: yay for the revolution!

Like these false options, Ashley Smith’s article is a fairy tale devoid of reality. His bias is shown as he criticizes the Left for ignoring “Assad’s massacre of some 400,000 Syrians”. Included in this death count are [100 – 150 thousand Syrian soldiers and allies](#). Ashley blames Assad instead of the armed opposition for killing Syrian soldiers!

Another example of false propaganda is the discussion of the chemical weapons attack that took place on August 21, 2013 in outer Damascus. Neoconservatives speak of this event as “proving” Assad’s brutality – “killing his own people” – as well as the “failure” of President Obama to enforce his “red line”. Ashley aligns with the neocons as he says “Barack Obama came under pressure to intervene militarily in Syria after the regime carried out a chemical weapons attack in a suburb of Damascus in 2013, but he backed a Russian-brokered resolution that protected Assad.”

In reality, the Damascus sarin gas attack was carried out by an opposition group with the goal of forcing the U.S. to directly attack the Syrian government. Soon after the event, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity issued a [statement](#) reporting “the most reliable

intelligence shows that Bashar al-Assad was NOT responsible for the chemical incident". Later on, Seymour Hersh wrote two lengthy investigations pointing to [Jabhat al Nusra with Turkish support](#) being culpable. Investigative journalist Robert Parry [exposed](#) the Human Rights Watch analysis blaming the Syrian government as a "junk heap of bad evidence". In the Turkish parliament, Turkish deputies presented documents showing that Turkey provided sarin to Syrian "rebels". A detailed examination and analysis of all fact based stories in online at whoghouta.blogspot.com. Their conclusion is that "The only plausible scenario that fits the evidence is an attack by opposition forces."

Ashley Smith accuses the Syrian government of widespread torture. His main example is the case of Syrian Canadian [Maher Arar](#) who was arrested by US authorities in collusion with Canadian authorities, then rendered to Syria for interrogation in 2002. Arar was beaten during the initial weeks of his interrogation in Syria. After ten months imprisonment, Syrian authorities determined he was not a terrorist and sent him back to Canada. Arar received an official apology and \$10 Million from the Canadian government.

The most highly publicized accusation of rampant torture and murder by Syrian authorities is the case of "Caesar". The individual known as "Caesar" was presented as a defecting Syrian photographer who had 55,000 photos documenting 11,000 Syrians tortured by the brutal Assad dictatorship. At the time, among mainstream media only the Christian Science Monitor was skeptical, describing it as "a well timed propaganda exercise". In the past year it has been discovered that nearly half the photos show the opposite of what is claimed. The [Caesar story](#) is essentially a fraud funded by Qatar with 'for hire' lawyers giving it a professional veneer and massive mainstream media promotion.

While western media routinely refers to Assad as a dictator, in fact he is elected and [popular with the majority of Syrians](#). Although not wealthy, Syria was largely self-sufficient with a semi-socialist state apparatus including free health-care, free education and large industries 51% owned by the state. You do not see pervasive western fast food, banks, and other corporate entities in Syrian cities. In the wake of protests, the government pushed through reforms which ended the one party system. There are now political parties across the political spectrum. These are a genuine 'moderate opposition'. The June 2014 election [confirmed](#) Assad's popularity despite the denials of those who have never been there.

Technique 2: Romanticize the opposition ... "the Syrian Revolution"

Ashley Smith echoes mainstream media which portrays the conflict as a "civil war" which began with peaceful democratic loving Syrian revolutionaries beaten by a brutal regime.

In reality there was a violent faction from the start. In the first protests in Deraa [seven police were killed](#). Two weeks later there was a [massacre](#) of 60 security forces in Deraa. In Homs, an [eye-witness](#) recounted the situation: *"From the start, the protest movements were not purely peaceful. From the start I saw armed demonstrators marching along in the protests, who began to shoot at the police first. Very often the violence of the security forces has been a reaction to the brutal violence of the armed rebels."* In the first two months, hundreds of police and security forces were killed.

Ashley and company listen to Americans and British citizens and mistakenly believe they are listening to real Syrians. Some of these people left Syria at age 3. Some of them have never lived in Syria. Thus you have fantasy portrayals such as "Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War". A more realistic picture is given by a Syrian who still lives in Aleppo.

He writes under the name “Edward Dark” and describes how he and his friends quickly regretted the take-over of Aleppo by armed groups in summer 2012. He [describes](#) one friend’s reaction as the reality was hitting home: *“How could we have been so stupid? We were betrayed!”*. And another says: *“Tell your children someday that we once had a beautiful country, but we destroyed it because of our ignorance and hatred.”* Edward Dark is a harsh critic of President Assad and Baath Party. He is also naive regarding the role of US Ambassador Robert Ford. But his description of early protesters and the arrival of armed opposition rings true and more authentic than the portrayal of Yassin-Kassab and Al Shami.

In fact many of the idealized “Syrian revolutionaries” promoted by the authors of “Burning Country” are trained and paid agents of the US and UK. The [Aleppo Media Center](#) which produces many of the videos is a US creation. The [White Helmets](#) which purport to be Syrian, independent and unarmed first responders are a creation of the US and UK. The [banner boys from Kafranbel](#) are another western funded operation. In her book about her time as Secretary of State, Clinton boasts of providing “training for more than a thousand activists, students, and independent journalists” (p. 464).

Why do the enemies of Syria create such organizations? Partly as a way to channel money and support to the armed opposition. Also to serve as propaganda tools to confuse the situation and generate support for the real goal: regime change. For example, White Helmets mostly work in areas dominated by the Syrian Al Qaeda. Unlike legitimate organizations such as the Red Crescent, they never work in areas controlled by the government. And they are also active on the propaganda front, continually pushing for US / NATO intervention via a “no fly zone”. The misinformation of Ashley Smith and ISO confuses unwitting people and helps the enemies of Syria in their drive for regime change.

In contrast with the romanticized delusions of Ashley Smith and the authors of “Burning Country”, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency gave an [accurate assessment](#) in August 2012:

“EVENTS ARE TAKING A CLEAR SECTARIAN DIRECTION. THE SALAFIST, THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AND AQI ARE THE MAJOR FORCES DRIVING THE INSURGENCY IN SYRIA.”

Technique 3: Attack Those who Question the Dogma ... “You’re an Assad supporter!”

Ashley Smith does not criticize the NATO and Gulf states that are violating international law and the UN charter by funding and supplying a proxy army to attack Syria. Instead, he criticizes left groups who oppose the aggression. That is a sign of how far off track ISO is. They did the [same thing](#) regarding Libya and have evidently learned nothing from that disaster. Ashley Smith should go and tour Libya now to savor the “revolution” he promoted.

Ashley Smith’s theme with respect to Syria (peaceful popular uprising against brutal dictator) is the same theme promoted by neoconservatives and the mainstream media. When they encounter a different perspective, they cry out, “You are an Assad supporter!”. Never mind that many genuine progressives do not say that. What we say is that it’s for the Syrian people to determine their government, not foreigners.

Smith criticizes the British Stop the War coalition for having “adapted to Assad supporters” and for “giving a platform to allies of the dictatorship”, specifically “regime apologist Mother Superior Agnes Mariam”. Smith is misinformed on this issue also, but it is doubly revealing.

In fact, Mother Agnes was hosted on the tour by Syria Solidarity Movement. When she was in London, she was invited to speak at a Stop the War rally. To his great discredit, the keynote speaker Jeremy Scahill, who is closely aligned with ISO, threatened to withdraw from the conference if Mother Agnes spoke. Scahill has done great journalistic work exposing Blackwater and Drone Warfare. However that does not excuse the [complicity](#) leading to [blackmail](#) regarding a Palestinian Lebanese nun who has shown immense courage in [promoting reconciliation](#) and peace in Syria. However, that action is typical of some misguided “socialist” groups, the Muslim Brotherhood and their allies. Mother Agnes was verbally attacked and abused by these groups throughout her tour, which otherwise met with great success. Mother Agnes has lived in Syria for over twenty years. She consistently says that Syria needs reform, but you don’t do that by destroying it.

Ashley Smith goes on to criticize the US Peace Council for recently sending a delegation to Syria and having the audacity to talk with “Assad and his henchmen”. He sounds like the right wing hawks who denounced Jane Fonda for going to North Vietnam in the 1970’s. Smith displays a dogmatic and closed-minded view; what kind of “international socialism” does he represent?

Smith criticizes Green Party candidates Jill Stein and Ajamu Baraka for “remaining silent about Putin’s and Assad’s atrocities”. This is another measure of how far off track the ISO is. They evidently are not aware of international law or they don’t care about it. The Assad government has a right to defend itself against terrorist attacks which are sponsored, funded and supplied by foreign governments.

Syria also has a right to request help from Russia and Iran. But with tunnel-vision dogma, Ashley Smith and ISO do not care. They seem to be supporting instead of opposing imperialist aggression, violations of international law, and the death and destruction these have led to.

Ashley disparages the Syrian government and people who have continued to fight against the forces of sectarianism promoted by NATO, Israel and the Gulf monarchies. Ashley and ISO would do well to send some people to see the reality of Syria. They would find it very different than their fevered imagination or what they have been led to believe by fake Syrians and Muslim Brotherhood dogmatists.

Genuine progressives are not “Assad supporters”. Rather, we are opponents of imperialist aggression and supporters of international law—which says it’s the right of Syrians to determine who leads them. That would mean real Syrians, not those raised in or paid by the West.

Ashley Smith’s Inaccurate Overall Analysis

Ashley Smith gives a very inaccurate analysis of the overall geopolitical situation in Syria and beyond.

He says “The US has been seeking a resolution that might push Assad aside, but that above all maintains his regime in power”. He goes on to say “U.S. policy from the beginning has been to preserve the core of Assad’s state.” Ashley believes “the U.S. has retreated in general from outright regime change as its strategy in the Middle East”.

This is absurd. In reality the US and allies Israel and Saudi Arabia have been pushing for

'regime change' in Syria for over a decade. In 2005 CNN host Christiane Amanpour expressed the situation bluntly:

"Mr. President, you know the rhetoric of regime change is headed towards you from the United States. They are actively looking for a new Syrian leader. They're granting visas and visits to Syrian opposition politicians. They're talking about isolating you diplomatically and, perhaps, a coup d'etat or your regime crumbling. What are you thinking about that?"

In 2007, Seymour Hersh wrote about the destabilization efforts in his article ["The Redirection"](#).

In 2010, Secretary of State Clinton spoke of "changing Syria's behavior" and [threatened](#) *"President Assad is making decisions that could mean war or peace for the region We know he's hearing from Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas. It is crucial that he also hear directly from us, so that the potential consequences of his actions are clear."*

Secretary Clinton appointed Robert Ford to become US Ambassador to Syria. Ford was previously the chief political officer in Baghdad for Ambassador John Negroponte. Who is John Negroponte? He was Ambassador to Honduras overseeing the Nicaraguan Contras and El Salvador death squads in the 1980's. Negroponte's arrival in Iraq in 2004 led to ["the El Salvador option"](#) (sectarian death squads) in Iraq.

Since the conflict in Syria began in 2011 the US has spent many billions of dollars trying to overthrow the Syrian government or force it to change policy. The supply of sophisticated and deadly weaponry continues. In April 2016 it was [reported](#) that the US recently supplied 994 TONS of sophisticated rocket launchers, anti tank and other heavy weapons to "moderate rebels" who ally with the Syrian Al Qaeda (Jabhat al Nusra recently renamed Jabhat Fatah al Sham).

Ashley's theory that the US is intent on "preserving" the Syrian state and the US has "given up" on regime change is not supported by the facts.

Ashley continues the faulty analysis by saying "the U.S. is solely and obsessively focused on defeating this counterrevolutionary force (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria" and "the Obama administration has struck a de facto alliance with Russia".

This is more theory without evidence. The US coalition was doing little to stop ISIS and looked the other way as ISIS went across the open desert to attack and occupy Palmyra. They were similarly looking the other way as ISIS sent hundreds of trucks filled with oil from eastern Syria into Turkey each day. It was not until Russia entered the scene in support of Syria one year ago, that the US coalition got embarrassed into actually attacking ISIS. As to a "de facto alliance", this is what Russia has implored the US to do, largely without response. In the past two weeks the U.S. has threatened Russian and Syrian planes not to attack US ground forces inside Syria and refused to come to agreement with Russia that "moderate rebels" working with acknowledged terrorists are not "moderate" and can be targeted.

The Obama administration is trying to prevent the collapse of the regime change project by stalling and delay. Perhaps they wish to keep the project alive for a more aggressive US policy. Hillary Clinton continues to talk about a "no fly zone". Her allies in Congress have recently initiated HR5732 which will escalate economic and financial sanctions against Syria

and assess the implementation of a “no fly zone”.

Ashley Smith suggests that large portions of the US left have been avidly supporting “oppressive regimes” such as Syria and Iran. He mocks those on the left who suggested the Iranian ‘green movement’ was US-influenced. His mockery is exposed as ignorance by none other than Hillary Clinton herself. In her book “Hard Choices” she recounts how they arranged for Twitter to postpone a system upgrade which would have taken the social media giant offline at a critical time, right after the 2009 Iranian election. Hillary and her group at the State Dept were actively promoting the protests in Iran.

Dangerous Times Ahead

Some middle east analysts have made the faulty analysis that Israel is not involved in the aggression against Syria. In reality, Israeli interests are at the core of the US policy against Syria. The Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. was explicit: [“Israel wanted Assad gone since start of civil war”](#). He also said “bad guys supported by Iran” are worse than “bad guys not supported by Iran”. In other words, Israel prefers chaos and Al Qaeda to a stable independent Syria.

Saudi Arabia is the other key U.S. ally seeking overthrow in Syria. With its close connections to the oil industry, military industrial complex and Wall Street, Saudi Arabia has enormous influence in Washington. It has been mercilessly bombing Yemen for the last 18 months and continues funding and promoting the proxy war against Syria.

Both Saudi Arabia and Israel seek the same thing: breaking the resistance alliance which runs from Iran through Syria to Lebanon. They are in alliance with US neoconservatives who still dream of “a new American Century” where the US fights multiple wars to enforce its exceptional and sole supremacy. Along with some other countries, these are the forces of reaction violating international law and promoting the war against Syria.

The tide is turning against the forces pushing for ‘regime change’ in Syria. But they have not yet given up and may even escalate. Now is when progressives in the West need to raise our voices in opposition to this aggression. Jill Stein and Ajamu Baraka can hopefully bring much more attention to this critical issue. Bernie Sanders and his supporters need to speak out against Hillary Clinton’s statements and plans.

There are good people in ISO which does good work in many areas. We hope they will re-examine their assumptions, beliefs and actions regarding Syria. In the dangerous times ahead, we need them to be resisting the drive to war in Syria, not condoning or supporting it.

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