

SYRIA: Arab League Observer Mission Refutes Mainstream Media Narrative

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The Arab League Observer Mission succeeded in providing a different perspective from that of the mainstream western media about what has been happening on the ground in Syria. After a resolution by the Arab League which was worked out in an agreement with the Syrian government, Observers from the League went to Syria and provided a means of investigating what was happening.

The report of the Observers mission that was concluded on January 19, noted several important observations.(1)

1. The mission noted that there were false reports being made of explosions or violence and when the observers went to the location, they found that the reports were unfounded.
2. The mission found that media accounts were exaggerated about the nature of incidents or numbers of people killed in incidents and protests.
3. There were discrepancies in the lists the Mission received of people in detention. Names were repeated, or information was missing or inaccurate about detainees.
4. The Mission observed armed groups committing acts of violence against Government forces, resulting in the death and injury of the forces being attacked. Some of the armed groups were using flares and armour-piercing projectiles.
5. A French journalist who was killed and a Belgium journalist who was injured were the victims of opposition mortar shells.
6. The mission was the target of a hostile media campaign with media publishing untrue statements, distorting the truth, and attributing statements to the head of the mission which were never made.
7. Such accounts by the media undermined the work of the observer mission and seemed to be aimed toward making the mission fail.
8. The Observer mission was able to fulfill its mandate.

The most important observation was as the Report stated, that it had “determined that there is an armed entity” that had not been mentioned in the protocol setting up the mission.

This armed opposition entity was a force that needed to be taken into account in structuring the mission. The report listed a number of violent incidents, some of which were carried out by the Free Syrian Army and some of the other armed opposition groups, stating that such incidents would widen the gap and increase the bitterness in the situation.

The observers requested the continuation of the mission, but with proper equipment and numbers, for another month. The committee in charge approved the request. The mission was to be extended. But suddenly, a different agenda was put into action, an agenda calling for regime change in Syria. Similarly, armed attacks against the government were stepped up and government forces sought to stem these attacks.

What had been a promising beginning for a contribution to a peaceful settlement of the conflict, was hijacked by forces intent on imposing a military solution of regime change on Syria.

Subsequently, pressure was put on the UN Security Council, pressure from both inside and outside the Council to authorize a proposal for regime change in Syria and for foreign intervention against Syria. The scenario is to play out with a high level meeting at the Security Council on Tuesday, January 31, of Foreign Ministers of some of the nations on the Council.

Also there was a report at Voltaire Network that on Sunday night, January 29, the Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Abdul Al-Zayani, went to Brussels to meet with the Secretary General of NATO, Anders Fogh Rasmussen. (2)

Recent information is that the Arab League Secretary-General decided to freeze the Observer Mission which had been renewed for another month by the League's Ad Hoc Ministerial Council. The Committee, according to an article at Voltaire Network is "an Arab Plan follow-up organism consisting of 5 States out of 22 (Algeria, Egypt, Oman, Qatar, Sudan). (3) This Ad Hoc Ministerial Committee adopted the observer's report by a vote of 4 votes in favor (Algeria, Egypt, Oman and Sudan), 1 against (Qatar). Little media coverage was given to this vote.

Voltaire Network also reported that the Secretary General of the Arab League, Nabil Al-Arabi took the view that the observers were jeopardized after "the spiritual leader of the Syrian Salafists, Sheikh Adnan Al-Arouri announced over Al-Arabiya airwaves that it was lawful to kill the Arab observers." (4)

The decision to support the regime change plan by the Arab League was also made by a vote of the Ad Hoc Ministerial Council. According to the Voltaire Network, this vote was 3 in favor (Egypt, Oman and Qatar), 1 against (Sudan) and 1 abstention (Algeria). On the basis of this vote of 3 members of the Arab League, the Prime Minister of Qatar and the Secretary General of the Arab League were going to the UN to ask the Security Council to back their plan for regime change in Syria. (5)

On Friday, January 27, a new resolution drawn up by some of the members of the council and presented by Morocco, was introduced to the Security Council diverting the discussion from focusing on the positive results of the Arab League Observer Mission and how to support its continuation.

The hijacking of the Security Council Agenda from a discussion on continuing the process

begun by the Observer Mission to a regime change resolution against Syria was a process that received little media attention, but much media hype reminiscent of the media pressure on the Security Council which resulted in its resolutions against Libya.

While there has been the claim of great media concern over unverified reports of 5000 casualties in Syria over an 8 month period, there was comparatively no media attention to the estimated 60,000 or more casualties of the NATO bombing and armed rebels attacks in Libya over a comparable period.

The buildup of pressure on the United Nations to undertake support for using the Security Council to provide legitimacy for military and political action against Syria is a challenge to the obligation of the UN Charter to support peaceful solutions to conflict situations and to respect the sovereignty of nations.

Notes:

1. "League of Arab States Observer Mission to Syria: Report of the Head of the League of Arab States Observer Mission to Syria for the period from 24 December 2011 to 18 January 2012"

http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/Report_of_Arab_League_Observer_Mission.pdf

(2)"The GCC and Turkey Turn to NATO", Voltaire Network, 29 January 2012,

<http://www.voltairenet.org/a172551>

(3)"Media confusion around the Arab League meeting", Voltaire Network, 23 January 2012,

<http://www.voltairenet.org/a172476>

(4)"The GCC and Turkey Turn to NATO", Voltaire Network, 29 January 2012,

<http://www.voltairenet.org/a172551>

(5)"Media confusion around the Arab League meeting", Voltaire Network, 23 January 2012,

<http://www.voltairenet.org/a172476>

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