

The Syrian American Council's Pressure Campaign to Censor One of Its Major Critics

"Clearly these regime change lobbyists want to burn my book because it exposes their own cynical tactics." – Max Blumenthal

By [Alexander Rubinstein](#)

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*The Syrian American Council and a collection of pro-war lobbyists have led an intimidation campaign aimed at bullying a major Washington-based bookstore, Politics and Prose, into canceling award-winning journalist and author Max Blumenthal's launch event for his new book *The Management of Savagery*.*

And it appears to have worked. Politics and Prose [announced](#) that it would "postpone" the event, citing "concerns" over the event's "format, substance, ... [and] security" in a tweet. In a testament to the ferocity of the harassment campaign against the small chain, the company has pinned the statement to the top of its Twitter page so that anyone visiting it sees immediately that they caved.

Politics and Prose is the go-to space for D.C. book events. If you are on a book tour and coming to Washington, chances are that Politics and Prose will be hosting your event.

On Monday, I called the Politics and Prose location that was to host the event for Blumenthal. I was directed to the events department, as nobody in the store itself had authority on such matters. After being put on hold for a few minutes, I was told by an employee,

"I spoke to all of my co... my manager and also our events person and we have no plans for canceling that event. It is going to go on as scheduled."

What was left out was that the store had already begun making onerous demands of Blumenthal, including requiring him to have an "interlocutor" on stage, specifically, one who would appease the Syrian American Council. Blumenthal secured Andrew Cockburn, one of the premiere journalists covering U.S. and Middle East politics and a longtime correspondent for *Harper's Magazine*. But Blumenthal told *MintPress* that Cockburn was denied; Politics and Prose management insisted that Cockburn was "too sympathetic" to his own views.

Since [@PoliticsProse](#) caved to a harassment campaign spearheaded by a pro-regime change lobbying group & a gaggle of anarcho-neocons in NYC I've decided to release audio of the events department telling me on Monday that the event will "go on as planned" & isn't being cancelled pic.twitter.com/MVeRipFiul

— Alex Rubinstein (@RealAlexRubi) [April 4, 2019](#)

As the pressure campaign increased, so too did the company's suspicions of Blumenthal. One would think that they would be familiar with Blumenthal already, as he has appeared for three previous book events there.

Critics say that Blumenthal paints a rescue organization as a terrorist group and has mocked victims of war crimes. What they leave out is that Blumenthal's reporting [exposed](#) that rescue organization — the infamous White Helmets — as a Western government-funded public-relations project that has, in fact, been operating alongside extremist groups like Jabhat al-Nusra and Al Qaeda. And he has not mocked victims of war crimes, but instead made light of the *lack of evidence* of those crimes beyond manipulative social-media videos that ranged from the slickly produced to outright [sloppy](#).

Disappointed to see [@PoliticsProse](#) cave here. I personally think [@MaxBlumenthal](#)'s brave, incisive work should be given as big a platform as possible, but even if you disagree, pressuring a book store to cancel his book launch is censorship, & no serious person should accept it: <https://t.co/sYhVtcJfT4>

— Aaron Maté (@aaronjmate) [April 4, 2019](#)

In a phone conversation with Blumenthal just hours before the April 3 event, Politics and Prose co-owner Bradley Graham informed him that his reporting from Venezuela, where he recently [challenged](#) corporate media [deceptions](#) from Caracas, had also become a problem. Graham said:

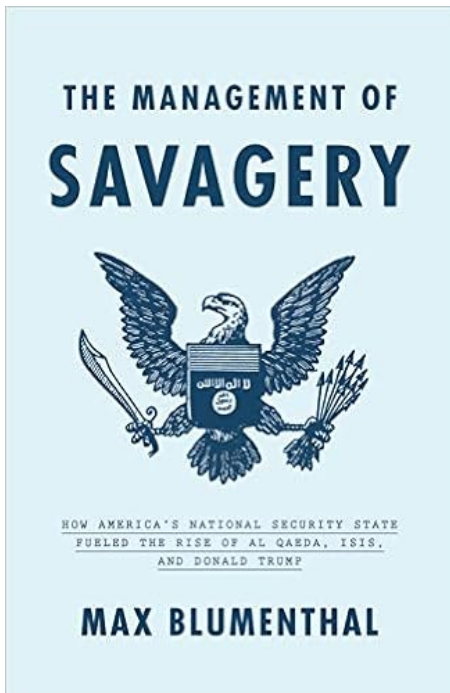
A number of people ... have expressed concern on various aspects of the event; first and foremost that you're being given a platform and in some cases raising not just objections about your positions on Syria, but on Venezuela, on other issues."

"I don't know what is behind all this, and this is the point I'm trying to get to," Graham told Blumenthal, according to the journalist. "We haven't had the time to sort through what all these claims are and whether there's any relevance to them or not."

Politics and Prose co-owner Lisa Muscatine chimed in:

"We just felt so up-against-the-wall. They're all over our social media... We've been fucking inundated."

The Syrian American Council [celebrated](#) the success of their pressure campaign, thanking Politics and Prose for "listening" to the "Syrian American community," whose views, in their implicit opinion, are monolithic. They went on to accuse Blumenthal of denying the "lived experiences" of Syrian Americans, who in reality are not so homogenous.



Thus they were able to silence their most effective critique. Blumenthal's latest book, *The Management of Savagery*, reveals the cynical aspirations of this lobby, from regime change to genocide, if its bedfellows are any indication of its aims.

Deceptions and double standards

Blumenthal told *MintPress News* that the criticism of his book willfully misrepresented its content:

None of these people who tried to have me canceled have read this book, but it's understandable that they would want it banned, because it is actually about them. But if they had opened the book they would see that it's actually a critique of right-wing politics and Islamophobia through the framework of American empire, showing how these proxy wars and regime change wars that the West has waged from Afghanistan to Iraq to Libya to Syria have been like steroids for the ultra-right, whipping up a xenophobic frenzy thanks to a series of refugee crises that our national security state fomented.

In my book, I go back to the era well before the so-called "war on terror" to show how this campaign of destabilization fueled the rise of Islamophobia, which Donald Trump effectively exploited to become president. So anyone trying to say this book is somehow Islamophobic - I've seen that allegation carelessly thrown around - clearly hasn't read it. I think this book is one of the most damning surveys of the rise of the Islamophobia industry and the national security state's role fueling it - and funding it in many cases. Clearly these regime change lobbyists want to burn my book because it exposes their own cynical tactics, but in doing so they're seeking to deprive people of the ability to learn about the horrible political crisis we're in in the West from a new and unique angle."

Blumenthal has been covering what he calls the "anti-Islam industry" for years. In fact, it is part of what brought the author to prominence. His [investigation](#) into the rise of Islamophobia in which Blumenthal named and shamed leading anti-Muslim agitators and funders predated mainstream studies of the trend and was even [blamed](#) in an angry screed

by the far-right FrontPageMag for providing “the idea behind” the Center for American Progress report on anti-Muslim politics, “Fear Inc.” Blumenthal told MintPress that he founded the Grayzone Project at AlterNet in 2015 in part to provide critical coverage of the dangerous anti-Muslim politics that Trump was exploiting at the time.

Can you give more details? Publishers and book sellers should defend freedom of expression. When there is a force against freedom of expression, this force should be defeated, met (e.g by providing an opposing speaker), or in the least, documented to thwart covert censorship.

— WikiLeaks (@wikileaks) [April 4, 2019](#)

During his exchanges with the owners of Politics and Prose, Blumenthal said he emphasized the double standards they were applying to him.

“I pointed out that last week they hosted Janet Napolitano, who was essentially the deportation tsar under Obama, destroying thousands of immigrant families through the [deportation machine](#) she oversaw. And I said that nobody asked her to have somebody on stage to challenge her when she, unlike me, was actually personally involved in human rights abuses. Politics and Prose has also hosted David Frum, the neocon who appears in the pages of my book crafting the bogus case for the war in Iraq in which a million people were killed. Nobody said that he had to have someone grilling him for his role in one of the worst catastrophes in modern history. The owners really didn’t have a response to my comments.”

Gulf-backed experts, foreign operatives and pro-war lobbyists put the pressure on

Blumenthal said that the owners of Politics and Prose insisted they’d spoken to “Middle East experts” about his book and that they expressed reservations about hosting him. But when pressed for the names of those experts, he received one: [Amy Hawthorne](#), a former resident fellow at the Saudi-funded Rafik Hariri Center at the Atlantic Council – a think tank backed by the arms industry and various Gulf monarchies that has been at the center of the campaign for regime change in Syria.

Before her time at the Atlantic Council, [Hawthorne worked](#) in the US State Department, where she “helped to shape and coordinate US support for Egypt’s transition and advised on the US response to the Arab Spring,” according to her bio.

Another one of the self-styled Syria experts who pushed to have Blumenthal’s Politics and Prose event canceled was [Charles Lister](#). Like so many of the lobbyists demanding the censorship of Blumenthal’s book, Lister is a fellow at a Gulf-funded think tank featured in the “Management of Savagery” for research that falsely claimed that 70,000 so-called “moderate rebels” were battling the Syrian government. When Blumenthal personally confronted Lister about his discredited claims during a 2017 Atlantic Council meeting, Lister flew into contortions and struggled to push back.

I’ve read [@MaxBlumenthal](#)’s book and there’s a section about [@Charles_Lister](#) that he would hate for the public to see.

Lister doesn't want an even more humiliating repeat of this: <https://t.co/wPZxOg3vFN>

So he resorts to getting Max censored. Sad!

— Rania Khalek (@RaniaKhalek) [April 3, 2019](#)

Mouaz Moustafa, the director of the Syrian Emergency Task Force, also joined the campaign to block Blumenthal's book event. In fact, Blumenthal's book documents how Moustafa served as the Washington point man for the Syrian regime change operation, escorting John McCain to the Syrian border in 2013, where the late senator [posed for photos](#) with extremist insurgents involved in the kidnapping of Shia pilgrims.

As Ben Norton [reported](#) at The Grayzone, Moustafa has continued to lobby the Trump administration on Syria. He even boasted that he was "hanging out" with CNN anchor Wolf Blitzer and MSNBC's Chris Matthews at about the same time as he was clamoring online for the cancellation of Blumenthal's book event.

"It is totally understandable that a character like Moustafa would want my book banned," Blumenthal said. "I excavated his shocking record of pro-war lobbying and expose all the deceptions that were deployed in the process."

The Syrian American Council, the pro-war lobbying outfit that led the charge against Blumenthal's book, has also been involved with some unsavory figures during its push for regime change in Syria. As Norton [reported](#), the Council hosted at its 2015 gala a Syrian opposition activist named Maher Sharafeddine who has openly called for the genocide of religious minorities in Syria.

"I am warning the Alawites to get out of the country or they will all be slaughtered. There can be no reconciliation with the Alawites," Sharafeddine said during an infamous 2015 [appearance](#) on Al Jazeera Arabic. "The only way for us to take [power] from them is over their dead bodies."

"It is the right of the [Sunnis] to demand the slaughter of the Alawites," the host of that Al Jazeera show, Faisal al-Qassem said, "Of course, of course," Sharafeddine replied.

"proud independent book store since 1984.." it says on your twitter banner.

You might want to revisit that claim. <https://t.co/DQ5QzgZk7G>

— Syricide (@Syricide) [April 4, 2019](#)

Perhaps the most remarkable figure to weigh in against Blumenthal's book and demand the cancellation of his event was James Le Mesurier. A former British military intelligence officer and UAE-backed mercenary, [Le Mesurier oversaw the foundation](#) of the White Helmets in Turkey and placed himself at the center of destabilization campaign against Syria's government. Through the White Helmets, who were at the scene seemingly any time a major chemical attack was alleged, Le Mesurier played a central role in driving the US to

bomb Syria over so-called “red line” violations.

“The whole history of Le Mesurier and the White Helmets in trying to push the US to decapitate the government of another previously stable Middle Eastern state is told in ‘The Management of Savagery,’” Blumenthal said. “Once again, you have a figure trying to cover up their dirty deeds by censoring a journalist who dared to expose them.”

From my point of view, and I told this to Politics and Prose,” Blumenthal continued, “they have surrendered to a bullying campaign run by a lobbying apparatus that’s tried to silence me and shut down my factual journalism, which has helped expose what I consider to be one of the biggest scandals in recent memory, which is the multi-billion dollar campaign to arm and equip extremist insurgents to rip Syria to shreds. But I think the public wants to know more about this titanic scandal, and it wants to know what’s on the pages of my book, and there’s nothing these war lobbyists can do about that. The mask is off.”

Blumenthal’s book is available through his publisher at [Verso](#) and many [other locations](#). The launch event for ‘The Management of Savagery’ will be held at the Justice Center at 617 Florida Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. on Wednesday the 10th at 7:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

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Alexander Rubinstein is a staff writer for MintPress News based in Washington, DC. He reports on police, prisons, and protests in the United States and the United States’ policing of the world. He previously reported for RT and Sputnik News.

Featured image: This composite image shows the cover of Max Blumenthal’s new book, The Management of Savagery, left, and an Associated Press photo of the late Senator John McCain posing with Mouaz Moustafa in Syria in the early days of the Syrian war.

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