

The Atlantic Council -Syria “White Helmets” Needed

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On April 24, 2017, the Atlantic Council hosted a program promoting the White Helmets, the supposed Syrian Civil Defense force. The event, held in conjunction with its Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, was titled “Ending the War On Civilians: A Discussion With Syria’s White Helmets.” The Council, an allegedly non-partisan Washington, D.C. think tank, asserts that it “shapes policy choices and strategies to create a more secure and prosperous world.”

The group, which had previously awarded the White Helmets its Freedom Award June 5, 2016, definitely wanted to shape policy choices. Like a previous event at Georgetown University in November 2016 (*Global Research November 17, 2016: NATO’s “White Helmets” Are Syria’s “Black Hats” and Georgetown University Supports Them*), the occasion was aimed at reinforcing American misconceptions of the legitimate Syrian government.

Throughout the 90 minute event, **Jehad Mahamed**, Liaison Officer, Syria Civil Defense; **Manal Abazeed**, Volunteer, Syria Civil Defense; their interpreter, **Kenan Rahmani**, Policy Advisor at the Syria Campaign; and **Faysal Itani**, Senior Fellow, Rafik Hariri Center pushed the idea that the Syrian government was making war only on civilians. They urged the audience of some 20-30 people to pressure the American government to stop the Syrian war and bring peace to the country. According to the glib, seemingly well-rehearsed panelists, the White Helmets couldn’t help the innocent casualties if the Syrian government and the Russians were bombarding them.

The group recounted the problems Syria faced as the result of **Bashar al-Assad’s** war: no jobs, no security, no schools, no education. Six years of conflict has traumatized the country’s children, they said. According to the White Helmets, Iran and Hezbollah aid and plus their militias greatly exacerbate the situation. Those fighters, they claimed, were embedded in the Syrian army. In a surprising twist, the panelists noted that they were sending casualties they had rescued (3,000 from Deraa alone) to Israel and Jordan for treatment. Israel, the representatives asserted, had the most open borders in the region.

In response to a question from the Hariri Center’s Faysal Itani, Jehad Mohamed claimed that **President Donald J. Trump’s** Tomahawk strike had brought them new hope. Prior to that, Mohamed opined that the situation was desperate because of barrel bombs and “well-documented” poison gas attacks. No one could stand up to the Syrian government he contended. Manal Abazeed argued that Trump’s strike ended their despair. She thought that someone will finally stop the killing and terminate the hostilities. Apparently arguing for more American attacks, Abazeed said that one strike was not enough. She alleged that air bases, other than the one Trump bombed, were still launching air raids on civilians.

The panelists insisted that they were apolitical, seeking only an end to war. They just wanted the United States to build a movement to stop the conflict. Amazingly, despite subsisting on funds and monies from other countries such as Japan, they said they don't need outside support or finances. They only wanted to reach the American people and obtain needed funds for Syrian families. Additionally, they went on to say they helped anyone who needed their aid and did not ask if they were for or against the Syrian government.

A member of the audience, Alex Abouhuessein, spoke up and said that Washington, D.C. needs people to tell the real story about Syria. Continuing, she held that few people here really know what is going on in that country. Another, **Mohammed Ghanem**, from the Syrian American Council, thanked the panelists and all the White Helmets for their heroic work. He maintained that anyone questioning the "Syrian Civil Defense" was a conspiracy theorist.

When several audience members probed the White Helmets' ties to NATO's intelligence services and their funding or the Helmets' links to terrorists, such as Jabhat al-Nusra, the only response given was a smirk. That included a question on their belief that the United States really cares about Syria. However, when one woman asked them about their vague concept of "safe zones", they happily launched into an explication of how all the countries of the region needed to create them and establish "no fly zones" as well. The podium members quickly backtracked when the interlocutor quizzed them about Israel's participation and would it end its aerial attacks on Syrian installations. The speedily revised story was that Israel was bombing THEIR army, Syria's army. The panelists wanted all bombing to stop, including that by the Russians and the Israelis.

The White Helmets added that there were not enough sanctions on Syria and the present ones were ineffective. The existing measures, such as limiting travel by government bureaucrats, did not prevent Syria from buying oil from ISIS or Iran, they noted. Failure to pressure the regime kept it running. This made it hard, as Abazeed said, for them to teach others their rescue techniques, including, astonishingly, their new-found ability to defuse land mines and disarm unexploded munitions. The White Helmet volunteer added they could lend their expertise to other countries, such as those devastated by earthquakes.

The Atlantic Council is, obviously, an arm of the neocon Establishment. Its policies, such as promoting the White Helmet extremists, come directly from its deplorable Directors, people such as: **Richard L. Armitage**, former Deputy Secretary of State; **Dennis Blair**, former United States Director of National Intelligence; **Wesley K. Clark**, retired General and former Supreme Allied Commander, Europe for NATO; **Stuart E. Eizenstat**, previous holder of high level positions at the Commerce, State, Treasury Departments as well as the White House; and **David H. Petraeus**, retired General, 10th head, US Central Command, and one-time CIA Director.

To find sources of fake news, misinformation, disinformation, and blatant propaganda, you needn't go any further than Washington, D.C. think tanks.

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